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A NOBLE QUEEN:

A ROMANCE OF INDIAN HISTORY.

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BY

MEADOWS TAYLOR,
C.S.I., M.R.A.S., M.R.I.A., &c.
AUTHOR OF 'SEETA,' 'TARA,' AND OTHER TALES.

'O, never was there queen
So mightily betray'd!'

Antony and Cleopatra, act i. sc. iii.

96923

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

C. KEGAN PAUL & CO., 1 PATERNOSTER SQUARE.
1878.


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TO

HIS EXCELLENCY

MOOKHTAR-OOL MOOLK

SIR SALAR JUNG BAHADUR, G.C.S.I.

THE EMINENT AND ACCOMPLISHED STATESMAN

AND

LEADER OF ALL THE ADVANCING CIVILIZATION OF THE DEKHAN

THIS WORK,

ILLUSTRATIVE OF A PORTION OF ITS HISTORY,

IS DEDICATED

BY HIS FAITHFUL FRIEND,

MEADOWS TAYLOR.

INTRODUCTION.

THE FAVOUR with which my former Indian tales have been received has induced me to write another, in illustration of one of the most important epochs in the history of the Dekhan. The character of the noble Queen Chand Beebee is still popular in the country; and her memory is reverenced, not only as the preserver of Beejapoor, but for the heroic resistance she made to the Moghul armies in their first invasion of the Dekhan and siege of Ahmednugger. The whole circumstances relating to the Queen, upon which this tale has been founded, are detailed in the history of Mahomed Kasim Ferishta, and can be read and verified in the translation of that work by the late Major-General Briggs.

MEADOWS TAYLOR.

OLD COURT, HAROLD'S CROSS, CO. DUBLIN.

August 27, 1875.

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Errata.

At page 81, vol. i., line 4, *for* Hoosein *read* Mamoolla.
„ 176, „ „ 4, *for* Hoosein-bee *read* Mamoolla.
„ 176, „ „ 17, *for* Hoosein-bee *read* Mamoolla.
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A NOBLE QUEEN.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

THE CATARACT OF THE KRISHNA.

QUEEN ELIZABETH reigned in England. In the Dekhan, King Boorhan Nizam Shah ruled over Ahmednugger, and King Ibrahim Adil Shah II. over the kingdom of Beejapoor. They were rivals.

It was a fiery day in the end of the month of May 159-, when a small party of horsemen, evidently weary from long travel, were passing over the plains which lie north of the Krishna river. They carefully avoided village and road tracks, and kept a steady course eastward across the cultivated and uncultivated ground which seemed well known to them. There were no hedges, as the fields are unenclosed, except near the villages; and there were no trees, except distant clumps here and there, which marked the site of a

village or hamlet, or perchance a lonely Mussulman shrine or Hindoo temple.

Nothing could be more dreary or desolate in appearance than the landscape; every green thing had long ago been burnt up; the soil was for the most part black and cracked; and the fields, which had been or were being ploughed, were broken into large clods, over which the tired horses strained with difficulty.

Beyond the river Krishna, which lay at a few miles' distance to the right hand, was a small cluster of hills, and directly before them a continuation of the range, which seemed to be broken in the middle by a gap; but the hills themselves were continually distorted by the hot wind and mirage, which had effect on everything about them.

Trees suddenly appeared to start up, which dwindled into bushes as the party approached them; villages, with their walls and roofs of white slaty limestone, rose into seeming palaces, glittering in the sun, and disappeared; lakes of water seemed to gather together, and again vanish under the fierce blasts of the burning wind, which carried with it at times clouds of choking dust. Men and bullocks ploughing were seen for a moment, then rose quivering and misshapen into the air, and vanished under an increased blast.

Now and then the droning song of the ploughmen came upon them in snatches, borne by the wind, and again ceased, and there was no sound except the plaintive whistle of the red plover, as

flocks ran swiftly over the ground, the shrill chirrup of grasshoppers, or the wail of the lapwing when it was disturbed and flew away. Occasionally large lizards with red throats raised their heads stupidly as the party passed them, or the small blue-throated species looked pertly from its position on a stone or high clod, puffed out its beautiful azure neck, and whistled a defiant note as it beheld the unusual sight, or darted into the hole or crack in which it lived, and was seen no more.

Over ploughed fields flocks of crows or white storks, with their beaks wide open, searched among the newly-turned clods for insects, and rose up with harsh cries and flew away before the mirage, and were soon lost to view; or trembling in the hot air took a short flight and settled again. Here and there a small river bed or a brook suggested a pool of water or thread of stream, at which the horses and men could quench their thirst; but they stayed rarely for this, and pursued their way with all the speed, a quick amble, that their horses were capable of.

In truth, painful to endure as it undoubtedly was, this hot wind and mirage had proved to be their preserver from capture, and probably death. The times were lawless and fierce; party feeling ran high in the Dekhan kingdom, and partizans showed little mercy to each other in the civil war then raging. Early that morning a small force of cavalry in the service of the King of Beejapoor had started on its way to join one

of the main bodies of the Royal army on its march to subdue the rebellion of the Prince Ismail, the King's younger brother. But the rebellion was, in fact, that of Eyn-ool-Moolk, the ex-Prime Minister, who in putting forward the young prince had trusted to regain his old influence and power. Nor did this seem at all improbable, as he was certain of the assistance of the King of Ahmednugger and his powerful armies, in order to pay off scores with his cousin of Beejapoor.

It was necessary, therefore, for Beejapoor to send all the troops at its disposal to quell the insurrection which had begun at Belgaum, and the party of cavalry under the young Abbas Khan, which had held a frontier outpost, being ordered to join a larger division, had been pushing on incautiously that morning before daylight, when it was attacked suddenly by an overwhelming force, and, after losing half its number on the field, was forced to fly. Many more were pursued, and captured or slain; many followed their brave young leader, occasionally showing front to their pursuers; but they gradually fell off, and only the four best mounted remained. Even they had had a narrow escape. From the brow of an undulation they had caught the glint of spears on the plain below, while they had also been seen in their elevated position, and were pursued with fresh ardour; but as they plunged into the hot waves of mirage, then beginning to blow, they had been concealed by it, or their figures so distorted that they could not be recognised.

We have no concern in this tale with the progress of the rebellion, or its sudden collapse after the death of Eyn-ool-Moolk, its instigator, and have only mentioned it incidentally to account for the flight of the small party whom we are following.

They seldom spoke one to another, for their heads were muffled in folds of cotton cloth, and the cotton sheets they usually carried on their saddles were now thrown over their persons to keep off the fierce heat of the sun. It was evident that two of them were wounded; and exhausted by the heat and loss of blood, could barely sit their horses. One of these was the young leader of the party, Abbas Khan, who occasionally reeled in his saddle as if about to faint from weakness, but again revived by a drink of water from a companion's leathern bottle, rallied bravely, and the march was resumed as before.

Abbas Khan, the nephew of Humeed Khan, and his adopted son, was, perhaps, twenty-five years old, or it might be less. His dress of Genoa velvet, braided with gold, was rich and handsome, but frayed with perpetual use, as were also the crimson velvet saddle-cloth and housings. On his head he wore a steel morion with a spike at the top, covered partly with padded velvet flaps, which fell over his ears and part of his neck behind, and were protected by small scales of steel; and a steel bar, as part of the morion itself, projected over his forehead, and was covered with velvet as the side pieces. Long Persian boots of soft leather, em-

broidered in coloured silk, greaves of padded velvet, strengthened by steel scales, covered his thighs, and steel gauntlets, richly inlaid with gold, defended his wrists and his arms up to his elbow; a waistband of a rich green muslin scarf, the brocaded ends of which were tied at his right side, partly supported his sword, which hung from a baldrick embroidered with gold, crossing his breast.

It was the handsome dress of a Dekhan cavalier of the period, and there was not a braver, nor as yet one more distinguished, than the young Abbas Khan. For the times were rough. Insurrections and rebellions were the normal condition of the country, and especially of the capital; while from Ahmednugger on the north, and Beeder and Golconda on the east, the frontier was rarely or ever secure. Often, indeed, great leagues were made among the rival Sovereigns, and large armies sent into the field, when heavy actions were fought with terrible slaughter. Abbas Khan's service had always been in frontier posts, and his daring character and athletic frame urged him to undertake perilous enterprises, with little heed as to the possible results; indeed, he seemed to have no perception of danger, nor thought but to strike a blow against an enemy whenever he might appear. Rash to a degree, his uncle had refused him a command in his own army lest by his indiscreet valour he might compromise the effect of military skill; but he had no wish to curb the young man too much, and as the best experience was to be gained in frontier ser-

vice, he had from time to time committed important posts to his nephew's charge.

Those who had escaped with him from the skirmish at Kórla were his own retainers; but they had, as we know, fallen behind from exhaustion, wandered into other paths, or taken refuge in villages. There were only three left—one, by name Jumal, as badly wounded as the young leader himself, who with difficulty kept his seat. He was the Khan's standard-bearer, and still carried the small green pennon he had defended so bravely in the fight. The second was Yasin, an attendant of his own; the third Runga, a chief of the Beydurs of the country to the eastward, a tall grim-looking Hindoo, who acted as guide. All were well mounted, but the hardy, active horse of the Beydur was perhaps the freshest.

The day was now declining, and the furious wind had somewhat fallen, but still blew in occasional gusts, accompanied by clouds of dust; but the wounded men could barely hold out, and there were drops of blood oozing from the bandages with which the Khan's chest and left arm had been hastily bound up, while the pressure of the velvet coat, soaked in blood, which had dried hard and adhered to a part of the wound, was exquisitely painful.

The Beydur saw that it was so, and tried to cheer his young master, saying in his rough Canarese tongue, which the Khan understood perfectly, "Fear not, Abbas Khan, fear not, an hour

hence thou wilt be safe in the fort. See, the trees of Nalutwar are already behind us, and my own hills are growing more and more distinct amidst the haze and dust. Cheer up, and set thy teeth like a true soldier as thou art; I say another coss and thou art safe among my people, and the wound shall be dressed again. And thou, too, Jumal, we will care for thee also. Faint not, man, but keep a good heart."

"I do not like the ceasing of the wind so suddenly," said Yasin Khan; "if the rebels were to see us now, we should have a poor chance for life."

"We could at least die like soldiers," was the Khan's reply. "It was my rashness which caused this disaster and the loss of so many of our poor fellows! May God forgive me, for I fear my uncle will not; and to your fidelity I owe my life, O friends; may Alla reward ye. Yes, I will hold out, if the bleeding will let me, but even now the ground swims before my eyes. Give me some more water, for I thirst." And after a long draught from the leathern bottle, the young man settled himself afresh in his saddle, spoke cheerily to his horse, and pressed on again.

They had not proceeded more than a mile when several men sprang out of a thicket and rushed towards the Beydur chief, whose feet they kissed with passionate tears and cries of joy. "Oh, thou art safe, thou art safe," was all they could find words to say. "We heard thou wert dead, lying on the field by Kórla, and some have gone to seek thee there."

"Peace," cried the chief, laughing. "See, children, I am unharmed and safe."

"But there is danger," cried several. "A party of the rebel horsemen have tracked ye, and are near us now. Can ye not ride faster? once within the pass and ye are safe. Ride on, we will follow."

"On your lives," returned the chief, "stop them there. Keep yourselves close within the brushwood, and fire at them as ye can. Their horses are as weary as our own, and can do little. Ye can defend the mouth of the Cháya Bhugwuti; or, if they are many, ye may entice them into the hills on the main road."

"And what would ye do by the Cháya Bhugwuti? Do ye not know, master, that Mother Krishna is running full, and ye cannot get refuge in the fort?"

"Ha!" cried the chief, "is it so indeed? and when did this happen? We did not hear the mother."

"About noon," was the reply of several. "She comes down before her time. Listen!"

As the man spoke, a deep hollow sound fell upon their ears. The wind blowing from the west, along the course of the great river, had prevented this sound reaching them before; but there could be no mistake now, and on passing a small eminence they saw the river in flood, from bank to bank, rushing rapidly along; while in the gap of the hill before them rose a column of mist, which

increased as the wind lulled, and again was blown away as a gust came down the river.

"If there were time," said the leader of the new party with his men, who were running beside the horses, "ye should turn by the upper road, and make straight for Korikul, but it is too late now for that; and how are ye to cross the river?"

"Let us reach Narrainpoor first, and we will see to that," said Runga, quietly. "Away, some of ye, to Narrainpoor, and tell the fishermen to go on to the lower ferry with their gear. Their lives shall answer for the young Khan's if there be any delay, and I, Runga, declare it. Tell Krishna, the barber, to have his needles ready; there may be time to dress the Khan's wound. Ye remember him, children, how he slew the panther with his sword, and how ye all worshipped him. Away! we have to save his life; no matter what the flood is, we shall be cowards if we do not place him in the fort ere the sun sets."

The men he spoke to were Beydurs like himself. Indeed, Runga was not only a chief but a relative of the Rajâh of the Clan, then a very powerful one, which could bring twenty thousand men into the field. Runga Naik held the lower part of the western frontier with horse and footmen, and had been summoned to join the young Khan according to the tenor of his service to the State. He was a true adherent, not only because of his service, but because of his love for and admiration of the Khan, and this

was shared by the people. It would be disgrace indeed if aught happened to Abbas Khan or his followers; and at their chief's appeal several of them dashed forward in the direction of the hollow booming sound and cloud of mist.

They were fleet of foot, and admirably equipped for tough frontier service. On their heads they wore conical caps of leather, which drew in by a string round the forehead and temples. Each wore loose leather drawers reaching as far as the knee, with a red waistband of strong stuff, and pliant sandals completed their costume. Some had sword and shield, with a knife in the girdle; others carried long matchlocks, with the powder-horns and bullet-bags hanging at their waists. Among rocks and brushwood they were invisible, and as the aspect of the country had suddenly changed, there were now granite rocks and brushwood enough to conceal a host of such men as they.

"Some of us had better stop here," cried the leader of the footmen, as they approached a small pass in the hill, "and wait for the rebel dogs if they come up."

"Do so, my sons," replied the leader, "but do not fire unless they make an attempt to pass you. And now, Khan," he said to the young man, as he pointed out a small village with some green rice fields around it, "that is Narrainpoor, and I vow an offering to Cháya Bhugwuti herself, if she allow us to pass her in safety. Cheer up now, and keep thy heart thankful, for all danger is past."

It was well, indeed, that the refuge was near, for Abbas Khan was past speech. He was faint and sick, reeling in his saddle at every stumble of his noble horse in the rough ground. Often he had patted its neck and encouraged it by his voice; and met with a response in a low whinny and a toss of the head; but now horse and rider were alike exhausted. The young Khan was conscious of nothing but a dull booming sound in his ears, which increased every moment, yet he clung instinctively to the saddle, and his standard-bearer's powerful arm alone had prevented him from falling to the ground for the last few miles. He had heard the Beydur's last speech with only a dim consciousness of what it meant, but he smiled faintly, and pointed to his wound, and to his mouth, which was parched, and was becoming swollen. Then Runga Naik dashed forward and returned with a number of men and a low bedstead; the young Khan was placed upon it, and borne gently into the village, while his charger was cared for by kindly men, who allowed him to nibble mouthfuls of the fresh green rice, as he passed on.

"See whom I have brought you, Bheemajee," said the Naik. "'Tis Abbas Khan, our young master, and a brave one too; therefore assist him, for he is badly wounded, and, notwithstanding, hath ridden through this fearful day without a murmur, true soldier as he is: but now he has fainted at last. Where is Krishna, the barber? He must see to the wound directly."

"I am here, Maharaj," said that functionary, stepping forward. "Show me the wound, and I will do what is needful."

They stripped him as he lay unconscious on the bed, and the stiff velvet coat being carefully removed, as well as the heavy steel morion, and his head bathed with cool water, the young man sat up, and at first looked wildly about him.

"Ul-humd-ul-Illa," said the standard-bearer, piously. "He wakes from his trance, and will live; but I thought he would have died."

"Not this time, friend," said the Khan, faintly enough, but with a cheery smile. "How much farther have we to go? Let me mount again and get on; we have yet far to ride, and I feel strong and well already."

"You are among my people now," cried Runga Naik, cheerily; "no more riding, and the fort is nigh at hand, where you will be safe for a long rest. Fear not, therefore; old Krishnajee will dress your wound, and they are cooking some kicheri. Praise to the gods! you are safe, my noble master!"

Then the barber performed his duty skilfully and tenderly. The wound was long, extending from the left breast across the left arm, and had bled much, but was not very deep. A few stitches were put into it to keep the lips together, a poultice of green herbs, carefully mashed, was placed over it, and a few bandages completed the simple dressing, which was borne, though it had been exquisitely painful, without a murmur.

The other wounded man was treated in the same manner, but he was weaker, and his wound was deeper, and a Mussulman fakeer who was present took charge of him carefully.

It was surprising to see how the young Khan had rallied; but his great strength of frame and vigorous constitution enabled him to conquer at last the weakness that had overtaken him, and after a slight but grateful meal, he professed himself ready to go on.

But now the old Patell interfered. "The mother river is raging," he cried; "do not ye hear her? and, indeed, the thunder of the cataract has increased as the wind fell. No one could attempt to cross the rapids below and live. My sons, be not mad! and let the lives the gods have spared rest here with us in safety. Go not to certain death!"

"Peace, Bheemajee!" returned Runga Naik, somewhat scornfully. "I have crossed the rapid myself when it was worse than it is now, and the mother has done me no harm. I tell thee there is no time to delay. Hark! dost thou hear that—and that? The enemy are at the pass, and there are only twelve men to hold it. Burma will not let them through if he can help it; but if they are many he must fail, and we perish. Ho! my sons," he cried to the people around, "who will swim with me across the ford? do ye fear?"

With a shout and yell, such as Beydurs only can give, a number of stout young fellows answered the appeal and ran for their

bundles of gourds, which were always ready. "We are your children," they said, touching their master's feet and the Khan's; "we will take you over, and fear not. Let us go now. There is an hour's good light, and we can remain in Juldroog and cross by the lower ferry in the boat. Come!"

It was indeed time, for the first few shots in the pass seemed to be followed up by others, and the shouts and shrieks of the Beydurs sounded closer. "Away with ye," cried the Beydur Naik to the men who had accompanied him; "tell Burma to hold the pass with his life for half an hour, then to retreat to the Cháya Bhugwuti, and hold that till death, if needs be." And as the men departed, the Khan's bed was taken up, the horses sent on before, and the little procession, leaving the village, proceeded at as rapid a pace as the rugged ground would permit.

"If the pass is forced," said Runga to the Patell, "keep the wounded man safely concealed, and bring what men ye have to the entrance of Cháya Bhugwuti, and all of ye defend that. If Burma and his people are safe, fire two shots down the ravine over the ford, and we shall know what they mean."

"May the Mother guide you, my lord," said the old man piously. "I vow a sacrifice to Cháya Mata if she let you pass safely."

The path was narrow and intricate, among huge masses of granite rock, which sometimes almost blocked the way. It would

have been impossible to have ridden through it. Suddenly Runga Naik stopped.

"You would like, perhaps, to see the nymph in her fury," he said, "and you can do that without walking. Come on to the edge," he said to the bearers of the Khan's litter, "and set it down on the terrace." The men did so, and Abbas Khan beheld a scene which, from its combined grandeur and beauty, struck him with utter amazement.

The terrace of rock was level, and his bed had been set down on the very edge. At first he closed his eyes, for he hardly dared to look on the turmoil of waters below him; but the tall figure of Runga Naik was even nearer the fearful precipice, and he seemed to stand unmoved. "Wait a little, Khan Sahib," he said in his strong, manly voice; "wait till a gust of wind drives away this blinding mist, and thou wilt see it all." And almost as he spoke the spray, driven by the wind, passed to the other side of the chasm, slowly unveiling by degrees the noble cataract, which he could now see nearly from the top, whence the water of the mighty river precipitated itself—to the bottom, where it was still partially veiled with spray. The river was full from bank to bank, and about a quarter of a mile, perhaps indeed more, in breadth, and fell from point or step to step of the incline of four hundred feet with a fearful crash and clamour. In no part of its course, except one, was the rock perpendicular, but it was broken by huge masses

of rock which showed their tops only in a few places. The steps of the whole incline were in irregular portions, which caused breaks in the fall and added to its sublimity. Here and there the action of the water had hollowed out large deep holes, which now and again spouted forth columns of water and spray to a surprising height, and fell back with a roar and splash with marvellous effect. The whole was a seething, roaring mass, which dazzled his eyes and, weak as he was, overpowered his senses, and he sank back almost fainting; but he rallied directly, and again the Beydur chief spoke.

"The pool is clear, Meeah," he said. "See, it is like all the horses in the world tossing their manes and fighting."

It was, indeed, a frightful place to look upon. At his feet, as it seemed, in a wide pool at the foot of the fall, the tremendous masses of water falling into it met other currents and eddies of equal power, and dashing together raised enormous waves which met in innumerable shocks, and cast their spray high into the air, whirling, foaming, breaking, with inconceivable violence and grandeur almost impossible to look on with a steady eye for a moment together. Yet the Beydur, to whom the scene was familiar, beheld it with a serene gravity.

"This is the nymph in her fury," he said, "and we worship her, and cast flowers and our simple offerings into her bosom to appease her. When it is past we can wander over the rocks and make

offerings at the holy pools, which now vomit forth the columns of water you see rising, and the pool now so fearful to look upon is as still as a lake. Come, you have seen enough."

But the Khan was fascinated. "A little while more, and I shall be ready," he said. "The first shock of the sight was almost too much for me, but now I am calmer, and I would watch awhile."

The sun had become low in the heavens, and the slanting beams of his light played over the boiling water with exquisite effect. The terror of the cataract had passed away, and only its beauty remained. Although the water was yellow and muddy, yet the rosy light played among every giant stream, or tiny portion of the vast fall, causing rainbows to appear, to vanish, and to re-appear in every part of the spray on which the sun shone. No one could count them: some remained steady for an instant, then broke to pieces; some were seen only to disappear; while beneath them the stupendous rushes of water from the great holes, rising in perpetual changes, seemed hung with these lovely garlands ever varying. The banks of the chasm were huge piles of granite rock, covered with trees and brushwood, which seemed to bend in homage to the genius of the place, and they were all now lighted up with roseate tints, while the deep shadows of the ravine increased the beauty and solemnity of the scene.

"Enough!" cried the young Khan, after a silence of some

minutes. "My soul is full of it. And such are the powers and works of the Lord of Might! Yet no one had told me of this most wonderful sight. Lead on, friend. I shall not forget what I have seen. This is, indeed, a land of wonders. And is yon roaring torrent to be crossed?"

"Even so," said his guide. "The Holy Mother will protect us if we are brave and trust to her. The water is smooth at the ferry though it is rapid, and we need to be careful. A hundred times have I crossed it alone, with only a few gourds tied to my back; but my lord is precious, and we have made every preparation."

Then the bed was taken up and carried on along the almost level top of the bank of the ravine, but the way became more difficult and intricate as they proceeded. Presently, as they emerged from behind a great cluster of rocks piled one upon another, as it were by mortal hands, the noble fort of Juldroog appeared. At first it seemed to belong to the rocky range on which the party were proceeding, but after a little time the Khan saw that it was detached and stood alone. It was a lofty hill, consisting of the same granite rocks as the range, and in its natural state must have been almost inaccessible; but it had been strengthened by bastions and curtains wherever they could be placed, and had been made a perfectly impregnable citadel. The house of the commander surmounted all, and from its roof flew the Royal standard of Bejapoor. The sun shone brightly upon the rocks, the brushwood, and the massive fortifica-

tions, and seemed to soften and harmonise their rugged details, and the young Khan looked eagerly to his place of refuge and his cousin's pleasant society with a degree of feverish anxiety, which was the consequence of his wound as well of the exhausting day he had gone through.

Now the bearers began to descend a narrow pass in the bank, which was traversed with difficulty, even by men; but the people who carried him were sure footed, and performed their task steadily and successfully. At the foot was a small portion of green sward, on which some persons were resting, with a bed smaller than that the Khan had been carried upon, with, as it seemed, piles of dry gourds tied to its legs and sides.

From this spot the view of the fort was even more impressive than from above. It appeared to rise like a cone to the height of five hundred feet or more; a pile of masses of granite, built up by Titans, but softened by foliage and brushwood. The bastions, which from above seemed to be part of the fort itself, now projected from the rocks in bold relief against the reddened sky, and the sun, shining down the river, lighted the waters with a soft red glare, which rested upon the fort and the mountains beyond with a rich, but lovely, effect. Before them the channel they had to pass was hardly more than a bowshot across, but the current, though smooth, was very rapid, and the water passed in undulations, either caused by masses of rock beneath or by its own

inherent force. These undulations were regular, and nowhere formed breakers. Already they saw the walls beyond and the beach, filling with people to watch their progress; but even the powerful voice of the Beydur chief could not be heard, and, taking a brass horn from one of the men, he blew a loud blast, with a peculiar quivering note at the end of it, which was answered at once from the fort.

"Ah! they know my signal, you see, Khan, and now we shall have thy cousin to welcome thee. Come, the raft is ready, Bismilla!"

Runga Naik had divested himself of his dress and arms, and placed only his sword upon the frail raft, where the Khan's dress and arms were also bestowed. The horses and the Khan's followers had been sent by the upper path to the village of Jernalpoor, and would rest there till the flood subsided. And all was now ready.

"Stay," cried the Beydur, "I would fain hear that my people are safe, and I have arranged the signal. Hark!"

Almost as he spoke two shots were discharged from the upper pass, and he knew that the enemy's attack had been repulsed. "Bismilla!" he exclaimed, as he sat astride between two piles of gourds, united by a broad and strong horse-girth, "one cannot be drowned with such as these. Now, my sons, take the Khan up gently, and place the bed in the water—wait my signal, and let the

next wave pass by. Now!" he shouted, as one of the waves of the current, passing by, broke on the pebbly beach. "Now, for your lives, Jey Mata!" "Jey Mata!" was repeated by the ferrymen, and the little raft shot out with the vigorous strokes of the swimmers into the stream.

The passage was not without extreme danger, for the power of the current was immense and carried them down a long distance, and the young Khan, as the banks seemed to shoot past him, and the raft was whirled round and round with great velocity, almost gave up hope that the stream would be passed; but the Beydur cried to him not to fear, for all danger was over; and, in any case, resigning himself, like a good Moslim, to his fate, he saw, after a time that appeared to him interminable, that the raft was urged into a backwater, and men on the bank flung ropes to them, by which the shore was soon gained.

"Well done! well done!" cried a manly voice from a crowd of soldiers. "I say, well done, Runga Naik, 'tis like thee to do a feat of daring like that; but whom hast thou there? By the Prophet, but I should know his face. Abbas Khan! brother! how comest thou here in such a woful plight; and wounded, too?"

"It is no time to ask questions of him now, my lord," said the Beydur; "but for that ugly wound he would be as strong and fresh as I am; but you see he has been bleeding all day in the hot wind, and has been often insensible, and seems to have fainted again.

Yet run to some shelter, I pray thee, and let thy surgeon look after him."

"He is gone to Moodgul, alas!" said Osman Beg, the killadar or governor of the fort, who was usually termed Nawab, "and all I can do is to recall him when any one can get across the large channel, which I fear may not be for some days. There is, however, the old Dervish, who hath a rare skill, and he can be taken there at once."

"Good, my lord; let him be taken up as he is by my people, and if thou wilt send one of thy servants with him, the holy Syud will no doubt help him, though he is blind."

"I will go myself," said the Nawab, "and see to his comfort."

Then the bed was taken up and carried on gently, and set down within the enclosure of a small mosque and dwelling-place. At first the old Dervish could not understand why he had been so suddenly disturbed, but on hearing that a wounded man needed his care, bade him to be brought in, and, after examining him, declared he must remain for the present where he was, and that the attendant whom the governor had nominated to wait upon his cousin should remain also to minister to him.

The young Khan was at once bathed, dressed in dry garments, and laid in a comfortable bed. The barber's stitches of his wound had at least held well, and bleeding had ceased. He was already refreshed, but he could not give a clear account of what had hap-

pened to the old Sheykh and his cousin, who sat by him. His pain had increased, and a low delirium had commenced.

"Oh that I could see you," he said, "but I am blind! Zóra, my child, make up the soothing potion for him and a poultice of herbs, and tell his people how it is to be applied. We will both watch him to-night, for the fever is strong; but, Inshalla, ere many days he will be strong again. Be assured, Nawab Sahib, that your poor servant will do his best."

"Then I leave my cousin in thy care, Hazrar, and will return early to see him," said the Nawab, as he saluted the Dervish reverentially and took his departure.

CHAPTER II.

"A NIGHT'S VIGIL."

THE night was hot, and the incessant roar of the cataract came fitfully on the ear as it now swelled into a deep thunderous sound, and again was softened by the night air. Under the effects of the opiate the young man seemed to sleep for a while, but the fever prevailed again, and with bright glassy eyes the sufferer now stared vacantly about him, recognising no one, and relapsing into insensibility; but he muttered low words to himself, and all they who watched could distinguish were an occasional fierce battle cry, and the broken interjections of a combat. From time to time the old Dervish felt his pulse and his head, but there were no signs of relief, and he sate down again anxiously. "The sun hath stricken him," he said to the child, "as well as the sword, and it may go hard with him, strong as he is. Alas! alas! if he should die? Yet he shall not die unless Alla wills it. If I could but see him. Ya Kureem! if I could but see him! Watch him carefully, Zóra, and tell me from time to time how he looks; give him the cooling drink when he is uneasy, and see that the cloths on his brow do not get dry. Ere morning he may sleep quietly. Meanwhile I

will pray for him, child, and if it be his fate he will live;" and the Dervish turned aside, and Zóra saw his beads passing through his fingers and his lips moving in prayer as he bowed his face to the ground.

So the child watched, and wondered as she gazed on the face and figure lying before her. Sometimes the features would be distorted by pain, and again this would be changed to fierce excitement, and the battle cries would be uttered with a fierce vigour as he partly rosè and waved his right arm as if it held a sword; but the girl put it back gently, and patted him as she would a child. Sometimes his lips would seem to be dry, and his tongue stiff and clammy, and he would cry for water faintly and querulously; and the cool drink administered to him from time to time soothed him for the moment, and he lay quietly. Zóra was an experienced nurse, for often she had attended the sick and wounded who were brought to her grandfather's humble dwelling for help. She had no timidity of men, she had never been secluded like other girls of her age, and her office was to lead her grandfather when he moved abroad, and to tend the sick who came for his advice. The light was purposely dimmed, but her form could be clearly seen, and we may endeavour to describe it.

Zóra was apparently about fourteen years old, perhaps somewhat more; but she was tall for her age, and her figure was lithe and supple. She was fair in comparison with ordinary Mussulman

women of her country, but not fairer than a light, clear, ruddy brown, betokening health and strength. Her head was small and perfectly shaped, sitting on a graceful neck ; and her hair, a glossy black, escaped from under the scarf she wore in a profusion of soft curls, which seemed to wind lovingly about her neck and shoulders. Her forehead was wide and somewhat low, but smooth and glistening, the eyebrows gently arched and regular ; but it was the eyes that involuntarily attracted every beholder, and with her mobile lips expressed every emotion of her mind. Now they would be fully and tenderly opened, and you would see the large soft dilated pupil of a velvety black, floating, as it were, on a ground of the tenderest violet and azure. A merry arch glance shot from them as they closed almost to a twinkling dot of light. They seemed incapable of anger or petulance, and, indeed, the child's life had as yet been one of little sorrow or excitement of any kind, and her natural disposition was gentle and submissive.

It was certain that her figure would be strikingly elegant as her age progressed, but as yet there was no indication of form, except a litheness and grace which marked every movement; and as she stretched forth her hand to minister to the wounded sufferer, her rounded arms, small hands, and taper fingers, gave promise of actual beauty in days to come; while as she threw back her luxuriant hair, the movement of her neck conveyed an exquisite undulating motion to her whole figure. No one could call the

girl beautiful, or her features regular; they would not have been nearly so charming had they been so; but her mouth and pearly teeth accorded with all else, and combined to produce a countenance as attractive as it was in reality arch, good humoured, and interesting. She was very plainly, not to say coarsely, clad; but the simple muslin scarf, which passing round her body and head fell over her right arm, was worn with a peculiar air and grace, and the petticoat of cotton-stuff was, perhaps, fuller and more womanly than her age required.

She was mistress of her grandfather's house; and the gossips about, though somewhat shocked at her being seen abroad at all, told her she was too old to wear a child's trousers, and they had been discarded. Round her neck she wore a single silver ring, and bracelets and anklets of the same, but hid away in a chest were some gold ornaments and rich clothes. And in regard to these, and to his former life, her grandfather was silent. Some day, he had said, he would tell her all, but she was too young yet, and it was a sad story. All that she knew of him from the neighbours was that, although a Dervish, he was a State prisoner, and the time of his first coming to the fort had been forgotten long ago.

Her mother had died in her infancy, yet Zóra's young life had been a happy one as she grew up. The old man had taught her the rudiments of Persian, and the meaning of words, at first parrotwise, but gradually, and with the aid of a village scribe, she

had progressed easily and satisfactorily. Her grandfather usually spoke to her in that language, and she could now write a fair hand, and record what he dictated to her. She had had few companions, except when she was a mere child, for as she grew older her grandfather admonished her against the idle gossip of the little village which lay beneath the fortress, and when she went out with him to lead him where he desired to go, no one, out of respect to the old man, ever addressed her. She had only one attendant, an old woman named Mamoola, who swept the house and cooked their simple meals, and was assisted by Zóra in all other household matters with unceasing skill and interest in her occupation. Who could make the tender hot cakes and the various kinds of vermicelli in which the old man delighted more deftly than Zóra? Who could sew the old-fashioned flowing garments he wore so well as she? And she had learned also to make quilted caps, and embroider them with gold and silver ornaments and spangles, which the soldiers of the fort commissioned, and were sold also in the little weekly bazaar, bringing a welcome addition to their limited means. Zóra's soft, pretty drawer strings, also, were knitted in elegant patterns, and finished with gay tassels, and there was an active demand for them. So, in all respects, the little maiden was ever busy, and any loneliness of life or care had, as yet, never reached her.

Zóra sighed as she looked on the young Khan, so restless in his

feverish sleep. Why should he have come to such a pass? Why should the pitiful Alla have thus struck him down in his strength and power of life, and cast him upon the care of strangers? What misery would be his mother's, or his sister's, perhaps his wife's, if they could only see him now, moaning and murmuring in his sleep, and now and again shouting his fierce battle-cry, "Deen! Deen!" and raising his arm to strike. What was war, that men should risk their lives for its dread honours, sudden death or a maimed life? War was, indeed, a common theme even among children of her own age, and there were names of heroes in their mouths. But war had now come to the lonely, secluded fortress of Juldroog. Soldiers came and went, and wounded men were brought in, and her grandfather was often called to them. Ah! it must be pitiful to see thousands of them lying on the bare earth, blistering in the sun, with horrible wounds undressed and uncared for; and the very thoughts made her shiver and draw her scarf tighter around her.

Before her lay a youth whose form was cast in a noble fashion. His muscular arms were bare, and his broad chest, except where it was bound up. When the features were at rest, they seemed to her grand and beautiful; and when he sometimes smiled during his snatches of sleep, a winning frank expression passed over them, and the gentlest smile she had ever seen. Again, in a paroxysm of pain or delirium, the whole was distorted and blurred, and the girl

turned away her face with tears and low sobs, which she could only with difficulty stifle. And still she watched, and the old man kept his prayerful vigil, and the cataract continued its monotonous, thundering roar, which seemed at times to fall into a sobbing moan.

"Lie down and sleep, Zóra," said the Dervish, in a low tone. "Thou must be weary of watching, my child, and the night is far spent."

"Not so, Abba!" which was her usual term of endearment for her grandfather; "not so. I am not weary. I cannot sleep; and he needs watching every moment. He will not bear the sheet over his chest, and is ever throwing it off; his lips are dry and parched; and he looks at me sometimes, and points to his throat and head, as if to ask for cool drink and wet cloths, and I have to give them. O Abba! will he die? Surely the good God will spare him. Come and feel his pulse, for he seems hotter and more restless."

"It is as you say, my darling," replied the old man, who had risen and felt his patient all over. "It may be the crisis of the sun fever, and he may be better, or may pass away in death at dawn. Go quietly; bring me of the cooling powders we made a few days ago; they are from a formula of Aboo Sena, of blessed memory, and are potent to check fever like this. Go and bring one."

"Oh that these sightless eyes could see but for a moment, that his face might be revealed to me," thought the Dervish; "names that

I have not heard for years have escaped his lips, and Humeed Khan is his uncle! What Humeed Khan? what Ankoos Khan? Eyn-ool-Moolk—is that traitor still living? Even as I sit here, blind and helpless, the old scenes—the noble buildings of Beejapoor, the pomp of royalty and war, are before me—all confused and blurred in my memory with the miserable King Ibrahim and his riotous debauchery. Strange mockery of fate! that when honour and wealth were seemingly in my grasp they should have passed into blindness and this prison. Yet it was thy will, O pitiful Alla!' and the old Dervish accepts it reverently. I must be careful," he continued to himself, as the light step of Zóra entered the chamber. "She hath never known, and must not see my weakness. Zóra, hast thou brought the medicine?"

"It is here, Abba," she said. "How am I to give it?"

"When he is athirst again, put half the powder into the drink, and watch the result. If his skin becomes moist, give no more; but if in an hour he is still burning, give him the rest. I can do no more, child, but commit him into the Lord's hands. I shall not leave thee, Zóra; but I am weary, and would sleep. If thou art afraid at any time, I shall awake with a touch, and will sit by thee; but where are the Nawab's people? they can take their turn, surely."

"All gone," said Zóra. "With one excuse or other they went away, and I have been alone; but one man lies without who has sat there since the youth was brought in, looking wistful, like a dog

which seeks his master. I asked him who he was, and he says he is Ranga Naik Beydur, but that he may not come in as he is of low caste. May he come, Abba?"

"Surely, child, surely. True Islam knows no distinction of caste in mercy's service, and thou mayest admit him to watch with thee if thou wilt; and 'tis thus, my brave one," he added, tenderly passing his hands over her face; "'tis thus thou learnest the ways of mercy and pity. See, he stirs and writhes. I hear his movement."

"'Tis but what has happened before," she replied, as she poured some of the sherbet into a small silver cup, and mixed the powder with it. Zóra saw that he drank it eagerly, and again shrank back upon his pillow.

"Now I will call the Beydur," said Zóra, as she went to the door, and found the man watching as before. "Rise, and follow me," she said.

"But I am unclean, lady," was the reply. "Who admits the Beydur within the threshold of a devout Moslim? Yet if I might help thee to tend him—my brave boy—my heart would thank thee."

"My grandfather bids thee come, in the name of Alla," said the girl. "Rise and enter; you are welcome."

The man rose, and bending down to the earth clasped her feet and kissed them passionately. Zóra could feel the hot tears

dropping from his eyes, as he put his lips to them. "So much love," she thought, "and for a Moslim!" "Abba lies in here," she said, as she crossed the chamber, and the stalwart form of the Beydur followed.

"He is welcome, in the name of the Most Merciful," said the old man; "let him watch."

"Not before I have kissed your reverend feet. I know thee, Huzrut, but I can be silent as death," said the man, partly removing his turban, and prostrating himself. "And I may watch?"

"Hast thou eaten, my son? dost thou desire food?"

"None," replied Runga. "To see him yonder and watch by him is food and drink to me, for I love him, Huzrut, love him as though he were my own child. If he lives, I will eat when I have bathed. If he die, I will stay till the earth covers him, and then depart, for I shall have a long and weary journey before me. Will he live?"

"As God pleases," was the reply. "I have done what I could, and he is in His hands. Watch and see."

Then Runga Naik sat down by the bed and watched with the girl. His touch seemed as tender as a woman's as he smoothed the pillow of the sufferer, changed the wet cloths on his head, and placed the wounded arm in easier positions; but still the moaning and delirium continued, and the muttering, of which Zóra could catch only a word here and there.

"His spirit is in the fight," said Runga, softly. "Do not be afraid; and he killed his enemy as he received that blow. But he did not strike first, and Meeah's was the strongest blow, and Elias Khan was dead ere he fell from his horse. Then we too struck in, and brought Meeah away safely, I and two others; but it was hard to bring him through the waves of heat, and now it is harder still, for they struck him down. Hast thou no more medicine? he must not rave thus."

"I have," she said; "but whether he will live or die under it Abba cannot tell, and I fear."

"Give it, in the name of the Lord!" said the Beydur, earnestly. "The remedy of a holy man cannot fail. And now lie down and sleep, lady," he continued, after the remedy had been administered; "I will watch."

"I cannot sleep," she replied, "let me watch with thee."

So they remained silent; but the two faces before her had a fascination for Zóra that she could not overcome. The one, noble, dignified, and in its full beauty of tender manhood, with its, as yet, downy moustache and beard; and the other hard and stern, with eyes and mouth that could perhaps be cruel, a thick moustache and grizzled whiskers, and a forehead seamed with furrows—yet all combining in an expression of tender pity and grief that could hardly be suppressed. What could be the connection between the two men, separated as they were by race and faith?

They watched till the day was breaking and the birds in the trees began to chirp and twitter, and a cock crew loudly; then Abbas Khan, who had been lying, as it were, in a trance, suddenly opened his eyes quietly, and saw the Beydur sitting by his bed. "Runga!" he said, faintly. "Runga!"

"Dost thou know me, Meeah?" was the reply. "It is, indeed, Runga. What wouldst thou?"

"I have been dreaming," he said, wearily, "and the last scowling glance of my foe as I struck him down has been ever before me; but there came at times a Peri of Paradise who gave to me of the heavenly sherbet, and the angel drove him away, and he could not take me to hell;" and he sank back exhausted.

"It is the crisis Abba spoke of," whispered Zóra, "and if he sleep it is well. Speak not, but watch."

The intensity of anxiety with which both watched the young man cannot be described, but the struggle between death and life did not continue long. Presently tears seemed to steal from his eyelids and fall upon his cheek, the quick gasping breath became more regular, there was a dew upon the lips, and the skin was becoming cooler and moister every moment; and yet, it might be deceptive!

"Dost thou know me, Meeah?" asked the Beydur. There was no reply, but a gratified smile overspread the face, and, taking the Beydur's rough hand in his own, Abbas Khan clasped it to his heart and fell gently into slumber.

"Oh! I vowed sheep to thee, Mother, for his life, and thou hast accepted the vow, and he is safe. Safe, lady, safe!" he said eagerly to Zóra, in a low voice full of emotion. "Safe, and he shall ride again with me against his country's enemies. Now more covering if thou hast it, for cold must not strike him. And do thou take rest, for the night has been a weary one to thee. See, the old man sleeps softly; Meeah said truly, thou art of heaven."

The excitement had been great, and the girl had not once closed her eyes. Now the kind words of the stranger affected her deeply, and as she lay down on her carpet, which had been spread in a corner of the room, tears burst from her eyes and low sobs rose which she could not control; but they soothed her, and she fell into a deep sleep.

The world abroad was astir in the early morn, the birds twittered and chirped in the great tamarind trees, pigeons fluttered in the little mosque, cooed and greeted each other, ringdoves seemed to answer them, and noisy paroquets flew screaming abroad to get their early food. As the sun rose, his ruddy beams rested on the grim rocks and feathery foliage of the deep glen with glowing lustre, and at the end of the Fort Island the noble river spread out into a large, quiet, lake-like pool. The cataract above still roared with a sullen moan, but the water was not so high, for, like all sudden and early floods, the river had subsided continuously during the night. The only one stirring in the house was the old woman

servant. She had milked the cow and the goats, and turned them loose to graze, and had sat down to pick rice for the morning meal.

"It must be kicheri and dall, I suppose; they had phoolkas and dall yesterday. No, I will make the kicheri; too much dall is not good for the Huzrut, and it will be good for the stranger too, if he wakes and the fever is gone. Ya Kureem! what a night it was, and yet that child never flinched once nor feared the wild raving she heard. Punah! I could not have borne it—not I; and when I looked in last, who should be sitting by the bed but that bloody reiver Runga Naik, who shook his finger at me and then put his hand on his lips and motioned me away; and Zóra lay in the corner sleeping, never thinking that that man of blood was nigh her. Ugh! I should have trembled too much to have attempted to sleep; but God only knows what that child is. Mayhap an angel from before the Lord, for she is born for good works and loving deeds. 'Nurse,' she says sometimes, 'are there none sick in the village whom I could attend? are there none poor whom we can feed? Go, look round, and bring me news.' She would be doing good now, I warrant me, if she were not asleep. But let her sleep and wake of herself, my fairy! my darling!"

"Mother! Mother Mamoola!" cried a rough strong voice at the entrance of the little enclosure before the Dervish's dwelling. "Mother! where art thou? I have been looking everywhere

about, but no one is stirring. Art thou dead? Is the Dervish dead?"

"Get away with thee, O bawling wretch!" cried the dame angrily, as she put down her rice sifter, not relishing this interruption to her soliloquy. "Get thee gone, I say, and keep silence. They are all asleep, after a fearful night with the wounded man," she continued, as she reached the entrance. "Ah! it is thee, Ghuffoor. Why art thou bawling so?"

"Do not be angry so early in the day, mother," said the man; "it will spoil thy temper. My lord the Nawab is even now coming down the hill with all his retinue, and must be admitted to see his cousin. I am sent on to warn ye all. Where is the fairy face? and the Huzrut ought to be at prayers in the mosque; let me go to him, wherever he be."

"I tell thee, again, begone!" retorted the dame, "Tell the Nawab Sahib that they are all asleep, and neither I, Mamoola, nor anyone else shall rouse them for the Nawab, or fifty Nawabs. Tell him this from me, Mamoola, and bid him go back as he came. The youth's spirit hovers between life and death, but, praise to the saints, he sleeps; and they all sleep, too, except Runga Naik, who watches the youth as though he were his own son. Begone, I say, and run at thy best speed, or we may have the crier shouting my lord's titles, and horns blowing, and a din enough to wake the dead."

"Well, if it be so," said the man, laughing, "I will deliver thy message, but the Nawab will not relish it. Hath he not prepared chambers, and have not the cooks been at work since daylight?"

"Ah me!" said the dame, wiping her eyes with the corner of her scarf; "you will have to eat the good food yourselves, for the youth may not eat except what the Huzrut allows him, even if he eat at all for many a day, except a mouthful. He is as weak and helpless as a child, after that wound and sun burning; and I am going to cook a mild kicheri myself. God grant him strength to eat, if ever so little. But I am prating to thee while thou shouldst be half way up the mountain. Away with thee, and return soon; if the youth recovers we will send word that the Nawab may come in the evening."

"Now I did what was right," crooned the old dame to herself, as she resumed her rice picking on the steps of the dwelling. "Perhaps my lord, the Nawab, may be angry; but who cares? What would the old man have said if I had let them all in, I wonder?"

"Mother!" said a gentle voice behind her; "Mother! he sleeps still. Runga hath not even withdrawn his hand that the youth took and held fast; but he motioned me to feel his head, and said it was painful. And I looked, and behold! there is a wound in it. Yet he has never flinched or complained. Mother, come with me; we can wash it gently, and we can put on the cool herbs

and tie it up. And Abba still sleeps peacefully, and the youth like a tired child, and never stirs. O, mother! he will live! he will live! May the good saints preserve him for his mother."

And the girl and her attendant went and did their kindly office. The Naik's wound was not deep, but he had narrowly escaped death, as he knew; and as the cool dressing was applied, tears of relief and gratitude coursed down his rugged cheeks.

"He sleeps: he is cool as an infant," he said in a whisper. "He has not moved nor let go my hand. Yes, he will live, lady; live to be grateful to thee, as I am."

Zóra marvelled at the man's endurance and heroism, so truly proved. All the previous day, though badly wounded in the defence of his young master, he had borne heat, and dust, and fatigue without a murmur or a thought except for him whom he had rescued from death, and he had watched through the night without food or relief from pain. "What am I to him?" she thought, sadly; "but I am only a child, only a child."

And the hot day passed, and they fanned the sleeper gently. The old Dervish, when he awoke, examined his patient carefully, and was satisfied. Nothing could induce Runga to leave his post, but having bathed hurriedly in the holy river, he ate a little of the dame's good mess, drank some of the cooling sherbet, and was refreshed. The Nawab had turned back as he had been bidden to do, but he sent continual messages of inquiry, and was told in

reply that the youth still slept. So the day passed in perfect quiet to all, and when the sun was declining, and the birds were coming to rest, the young Khan woke quietly.

At first he could not remember where he was, or what had happened, and his first glance rested upon Zóra, who was gently fanning him, and he said, almost in a whisper, "Who art thou? I know thee; thou art the angel that came to me in the night and gave me sherbet of Paradise. Who art thou?"

"I am only Zóra," she said, modestly, while she covered her face with her scarf, as if for the first time she became aware that a man gazed at her. "But you are not to speak, sir; I am bid not to let you speak; close your eyes and sleep again."

"No," he said; "I have slept enough, and the burning fever hath departed."

"She is right, Meeah," said Runga Naik, bending over him. "Sleep now, again, for danger is past, and Huzrut says you will live. When you wake again you may have some light food."

"Runga, thou here! I thought I saw thee in a dream, and had thy hand in mine. But why is thy head bandaged?"

"'Tis only a scratch, and the Huzrut has dressed it," he replied. "I will tell thee all another time. I am well of it now that I hear thy voice."

"It seems all like a hideous dream, Runga; the fight, the ride through those billows of heat and dust; and I remember, too,

seeing a cataract, and seething water below, tossing like horses fighting. Who told me that? And then I thought I was on a raft, dancing on the waves, and thou supporting me; and I swooned, and remember no more except the angel who came to me and cooled my parching thirst."

"Enough!" cried Zóra, stamping her little foot. "Do I not tell thee thou art not to speak? Art thou mad?"

The oddity of the child's vehemence, and her tone of absolute command, seemed to amuse the sufferer, for he smiled gratefully as he looked up at her.

"Yes, fairy face," he said, "I will try to sleep again, and do thou come to me in my dreams."

The next day, however, the Nawab was not to be silenced. His physician had arrived from Moodgul, and having visited the wounded man, declared that he might now be removed to the upper fort in a closed litter with safety, and that the comparative freshness of the air of the citadel would conduce to his recovery. Towards evening, therefore, the young Khan took his departure, promising to return to see them when he was able.

CHAPTER III.

THE PRIESTS OF MOODGUL.

THE town of Moodgul is situated in the western division of the district which lies between the Krishha river to the north and the Toongbaddra river to the south, and has always been a place of importance in the country. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries it was a never-failing object of contention between the Hindoos of Beejanugger and the Mussulman kings of the Dekhan, and many a bloody action between immense armies on both sides had been fought near it for its possession, and that of its dependencies. Ráichoor, the capital of the eastern portion of the Dooab, as the province was called, was at that time of comparatively small importance, and Moodgul was the capital of the province and the seat of the local Government. The league of the Mussulman kings of the Dekhan against the Maharajah of Beejanugger terminated in a desperate action called the battle of Talicota by historians, but which was fought in December 1569, on the south bank of the Krishna, about thirty miles west of Moodgul. The destruction of the Hindoo kingdom ensued, and at the period of this tale the town and its fortress were in quiet possession of the Mussulmans,

who have still retained it. It was then the chief station of the south-western province of the Beejapoor kingdom, and a very considerable force was always stationed there ready to act against any disturbance of the frontier, and to overawe the various military tribes of Beydurs and others, who, though they paid tribute and professed allegiance to the Mussulman Government, were yet turbulent and often defiant, and much given to marauding, cattle lifting, and other nefarious practices.

Even now, ruined as it is for the most part, the fort of Moodgul is a striking and picturesque object. Built partly by the Hindoos and partly by the Mussulmans, it occupies the summit of a group of singularly fantastic granite rocks, which seem to have been raised one upon another, but which belong to one of the great eruptions that took place at some immensely remote period. They are quite isolated, and rise from a level plain, which is fertile to their very base. Necessarily the fort is of very irregular construction, advantage having been taken of the highest accessible portions of the rocks on which to build bastions, while the intervals between each group are closed by single, double, and treble rows of curtains and bastions, as the ground requires. On the north side is a considerable tank, or lake, for irrigation, which is still perfect, and affords means of cultivation of a tract of land; and there are many groves of fine mango and tamarind trees about its shores, which soften the otherwise rugged character of the landscape, and above

which the rocks and towers of the fort rise with very picturesque effect. The town lies to the eastward of the fort, and is still tolerably populous; but the ruins on every side show that the prosperity of the place was at one time much greater than at present, and the fort itself is utterly deserted: many of its proud towers and long portions of the curtains have become heaps of ruins, and those that remain only show how strong the citadel must have been in the early times we write of. The place was famous for two kinds of manufactures: one of weaving cotton fabrics of all kinds, for which the adjacent parts of the province furnished ample material; the other, of a kind of camlet blankets, some beautifully fine and others coarse, woven from yarn spun from the fleeces of the large herds of sheep which were tended on the wide plains by local shepherds—a powerful and numerous clan, which, though ostensibly following a peaceful, industrious calling, had notwithstanding taken part in local wars and the defence of their fort; and both weavers and shepherds remain still in their normal condition.

It will be deemed strange, perhaps, that these shepherds and blanket weavers were Christians at the period of the tale, and that they have continued faithful through all vicissitudes to the present time. At what exact period they were converted, or by whom, is not precisely known, but a Jesuit monk belonging to the mission of St. Francis Xavier had penetrated to Moodgul, gathered the shepherds about him, and, preaching to them in their own

language—Canarese—had converted and baptised them, and they proved steadfast and obedient. In the town of Ráichoor other conversions followed, chiefly among the potters, and there were, and still are, smaller congregations in other villages; but the most numerous flock was that of Moodgul, and the church there is pre-eminently the head of all others in the province. The building itself is a small one with a tiled roof, and in the Goanesque style of architecture, and there are two supplementary chapels. The decorations of the cathedral, as it may be called, are poor and tawdry enough; but there is, or was, one picture of the Virgin by some Portuguese artist which has merit. There are schools attached to the mission in which Canarese is taught, and which are presided over by the priest, if he be present, or, in his absence, by one of the deacons.

King Ibrahim Adil Shah I., who died in 1557, was the first benefactor to the mission by recognising it, and conferring lands upon it by his Royal deeds of grant; and Ally Adil Shah followed, with settlements of money from the customs duties and other sources, which have hitherto been respected by local and general rulers. Dues are also collected from the congregation, both in money and in kind, and in all respects the mission is self-supporting and independent. The service, when by a priest, is generally in Latin; but the offices of the church have been translated into excellent Canarese, as also homilies, which are preached, and

selections from the Old and New Testament. Portions of these are read on saints' days and other solemn occasions, and invariably on the Sabbath by the deacons of the Church, who, when the priest is not present, carry on the regular services, except the mass, which is reserved for the priest alone. Some of these manuscripts are exquisitely written in a somewhat older and stiffer character than prevails at present, and the authors of them were unquestionably excellent scholars in the copious language they had to deal with, though it is impossible to conceive how they could have acquired it so perfectly.

It may be difficult also to account for the unusual toleration of the Mussulman kings of Beejapoor in allowing Christian missions to be established in their territory, and endowing them with Royal gifts; but Ibrahim Adil Shah I. and Ally Adil Shah had intimate relations with the Portuguese, who had assisted Ibrahim on one occasion with 3,000 European infantry; and though both kings had quarrels with their neighbours, and Ally Adil Shah on one occasion beleaguered Goa for nine months and was obliged to raise the siege, yet the Mussulmans and Christians contrived to make up their quarrels, and at the period we write of were very good friends. The mission at Moodgul was, therefore, in an easy and flourishing condition—outwardly, at least—but within there was trouble.

There were two priests in charge of the Moodgul church and

mission. One, Dom Diego di Fonseça, had been for some time in the office of the Inquisition; and the steadfast character of the missions being doubted, he had been sent specially to relieve his predecessor, who had been suspected of laxity in morals and practice. This man professed himself to be a champion of the Church, a Jesuit. He had already visited Bengal and China, and had, after the fashion of the time, made many converts, and examined the internal discipline of the missions with a notorious severity; but his private character was infamous, and, but for his official zeal and services, he might, indeed, have been condemned to the horrible death to which he had assisted to devote so many. Dom Diego was of a noble family in Portugal, and had been intended for the Church there; but his fiery disposition would not brook control, and he chose a missionary life in the Indies, where his peculiar qualifications would find full employment. In person Dom Diego was remarkable. His noble figure towered over all around him, and the haughty expression of his features was in accordance with his bodily power; but though handsome, they were vicious and repellant. In complexion he was dark, and the sun of India had still more bronzed his face and hands, till they were darker than those of many of his Moodgul flock. All soon feared him; none loved him. He was to their simple minds an incarnation of power and force which must be obeyed, and, knowing his official authority and rank, the native Christians did not dare objection, much less

disobedience. God would punish his evil ways some time—in His own time—they said among themselves, and they watched his actions alike with wonder and amazement. Could this fiend be a priest of the Holy Church of Christ and His tender-loving mother, whom in their simple faith they adored?

Dom Diego's colleague was a very different person. Francis d'Almeida, a Franciscan friar, was a very personation of a devout and humble follower of his order. It was some years since he had left Portugal, and on his arrival he applied himself with great assiduity to the study of the native languages. Canarese and Mahratta were both used and spoken at Goa, as well as the rough Oordoo of the Dekhan, used by the lower orders of Mussulmans; but he had devoted himself to Canarese as the most copious and expressive language of all, and best suited to the translation of the Scriptures and the offices of the Church. In the stirring ecclesiastical affairs of Goa he took but little part, and succeeded in avoiding them, and only prayed to be sent to some distant and lonely mission in Canara, where he could finish the work he had begun. The two priests were as different in appearance as in character—the one, dark, saturnine, and vindictive; the other, fair for his country, with clear, soft, brown eyes, brown silky and curly hair, which flowed over his shoulders, a gentle, expressive face, full of devout thought and pity for the religious ignorance he found to be existent. A selection from a thousand could not have supplied

a teacher and guide more fitting for his post than Francis d'Almeida. His flock adored him. His gentle teachings and admonitions, delivered with a purity of language which only a Brahmin could equal or surpass, attracted others besides his flock to the mission church, and his eloquent illustrations of true Christian life often moved his hearers to tears. To the simple shepherds he was an incarnation of Divine love and mercy, and under his pastoral care many new converts had been registered and baptised, who had been prepared by teaching, for the new creed.

He was not alone. His sister Maria, whom he had left in Portugal a child, had grown up, and married Colonel Dom Philip de Pereira, who commanded a battalion of infantry not long arrived from Portugal; but he had been speedily affected by the climate in jungle warfare on the frontier against the Mussulmans, and he had succumbed to the treacherous, deadly malaria of the forests. Doña Maria might have returned home, or, staying at Goa, might have re-married; but she had seen her brother Francis, listened with wonder to tales of the manners and customs of his flock, and at once dedicating herself, as she said, to the Lord's work, she was sent up to Moodgul under an escort, and had joined her brother some three years before the time we write of. She was clever and studious. Under her brother's care she had learned Canarese as perfectly as he had, and in her beautiful handwriting had copied all her brother's rougher translations into the great

volumes of the Church, and these manuscripts were illustrated by her own simple and elegant designs and quaint initial letters.

If her brother were almost worshipped by the shepherds, she herself had a place in their affections even more tender. She visited the sick and afflicted, and could comfort them; her sweet, persuasive tongue soothed many a sad death-bed. Her instruction to the children of her school was received by them as a joyful treat rather than in dull routine. All she knew she communicated to them as they showed capacity. It was not very much, perhaps, but it was pleasant to teach and pleasant to be taught, and teacher and pupils enjoyed themselves. Doña Maria was also a welcome guest in the Nawab of Moodgul's family. Dilawer Khan, a famous general of the Beejàpoor army, was no bigot; he loved the Padré Francis for the good he did and for his consistent piety. He even enjoyed arguments between the Padré and the local Mussulman priests and learned men; and the fair Doña Maria was not only admitted to his hareem, but was a welcome guest whenever she came. Then noisy children gathered round her, and matrons too, and she told them of the holy child Jesus of Nazareth, and what He did as He grew up; and taught the elder ones embroidery, and almost persuaded some to be Christians. Doña Maria was very fair, and the bright colour of her native land had come back to her cheeks with the fresh Dekhan air; and it was a great delight of the younger children to declare she had painted her face, and to insist

on washing it, which only brought out the rich colour more vividly. And she sung to them in her sweet voice, accompanied by her lute, the ballads and songs of her native land, and the noble hymns of the Church, and these were ever welcome.

So in peace and love with all around them the brother and sister had lived with great happiness. They had pleasant morning and evening walks among the groves and by the little lake. They had each a Dekhan jennet, and a gallop over the downs beyond was a rare pleasure, and gave them health among their hard labours. They had their garden too, and grapes and oranges grew well, and still grow in the Padré's garden. What could they require more? What they had was spiritual wealth and comfort, and as to worldly affairs, they needed no more. Would it but last! but since Dom Diego's arrival, now a few months, they had had many grave anticipations for the future.

CHAPTER IV.

AN INSULT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

WE need not describe the progress of difference between two such men as the priests of Moodgul—the one violent, overbearing, and unscrupulous, the other gentle and peaceful, but enduring, and, after the manner of such men, brave, and, in the service of the Church, undeterred by threats or persecution. Often had he remonstrated, as it became him to do, against his colleague's violence towards the congregation, against repeated instances of notorious immorality and irregularity in his ministry, but in vain. Dom Diego knew that he had strengthened his influence with the Archbishop of Goa; that the Inquisition at large were his friends, and that he need not fear the remonstrances of the humble Franciscan friar who was associated with him. He had formed, too, a party among the shepherds, which consisted of some of the most unmanageable of the youthful members, who scoffed at the friar's devotion, resisted his admonitions and decrees of penances, and, in short, set him at defiance. This was Dom Diego's first step towards ridding himself of his colleague altogether. What more easy than to denounce him to the Inquisition for interference with his own measures?

What more certain to succeed than to accuse him of the laxity in spiritual affairs which he himself had been despatched to redeem? Even were that not sufficient, accusations might be made of improper intimacy with Mussulmans, the worst enemies of the Church, and constant visits to the Nawab of Moodgul paid by him and his sister, Doña Maria. Ah! could he but separate them, who could protect the beautiful girl? From the first sight of her, so young, so lovely as she was, a guilty passion had absorbed any better feeling he possessed. No risk could be too great to run for her possession, and yet, to take any active part—to carry her away by force—would but be to ensure his own ruin, and perhaps death. No, the event must be gradual; and when her brother was once made over to the Inquisition he would be in Goa for months, nay, possibly years, where no possibility of aid or even news from without could reach him. It was a fiendish plot, and day by day he found it more and more difficult to restrain himself, for the constant sight of her great beauty inflamed him, and in the services of the Church he was brought into constant connection with her.

He had written his report to Goa. He had described Francis d'Almeida as a mere bookworm, careless of the honour and discipline of the Church, and absorbed in studies of heathen books; that his most intimate friends were Brahmin priests and Mussulmans; that his lectures in the Church to the shepherds were, so far as he could comprehend them, mere adaptations of heathen

doctrine, into which if he had not lapsed himself, he might do at any moment, and thus the Church, which had been built up with vast labour by faithful missionaries in a foreign land, might be lost, and relapse into heathenism, a scandal and a reproach to Christianity. As to his sister, Doña Maria, though she openly made profession of faith, yet she was in reality more corrupt than her brother. One of her constant resorts was the Nawab's house, where she was admired and courted for her beauty and accomplishments. The Nawab was very wealthy, and had a son, now absent in the wars, but it was currently reported that he would marry Doña Maria when he returned. Finally, Dom Diego advised that Francis d'Almeida should be at once sent for alone, admonished, and, if needs be, prosecuted for his laxity; and that his sister might remain for the present to await her brother's return, or to be forwarded to Goa, as the Council might decree.

There was no suspicion of sinister motives to be gathered from this document, no violence of expression. It led to the conclusion that an able but over-studious character had been gradually led into laxity of observance, and could only be recovered by admonition from his superiors, and it had been determined by the ecclesiastical authorities to order the priest to appear before the Council on as early a date as practicable. It was not easy to communicate with Goa from Moodgul. Special messengers could only be employed, men who at some personal risk could traverse the country intervening

and return with replies ; and sometimes merchants and carriers from the two cities made their annual journeys with coast produce, to be exchanged for the cotton and woollen stuffs of Moodgul, and who took letters to and from Goa, and delivered them safely enough ; and by one of the parties returned from the coast, Dom Diego had received the long-expected despatch from the Council.

To him it was all that he desired. It authorised Dom Diego to suspend his colleague from all Church offices, and to despatch him to Goa as soon as practicable, and it contained a citation from the Inquisition to appear. It praised Dom Diego's vigilance and zeal for the welfare of the Church, and admitted the justice of his proposal in regard to Doña Maria, whom he was enjoined to watch, and keep within the precincts of the Church, till she should be required.

Dom Diego was not long in deciding on the course he had proposed. After the morning mass, on the Sabbath after he had received the despatch, he proclaimed the suspension of his colleague from ministrations, and delivered to him the citation from the Council, which was received by D'Almeida with reverence ; and Dom Diego also announced, through his interpreter, that another priest, well skilled in Canarese, had been despatched, and would shortly arrive.

Doña Maria heard the proclamation with dismay that cannot be expressed in words. Her brother was officiating at the altar,

and she, with her children classes, was seated at the side at some distance. She saw her brother depart sooner than usual, for he generally came to examine the children, and he now omitted to do so. So she dismissed them, and went at once to their house, where she found her brother, in his chamber, on his knees before his crucifix, and the citation lying at its feet. He had been praying, and the drops of sweat stood out on his brow, in his agony, as those of his Lord's had done when He endured the cross and the shame. Doña Maria did not interrupt him, and withdrew behind the door, hearing only the last words of the prayer.

"And now protect me, O my Lord, if Thou wilt, from this danger. If I have to endure shame, or torture, or death, do Thou in mercy support me. I am not conscious of neglect of thy work, but I am conscious of many errors and shortcomings, of many secret sins. Chasten me, then, O my Saviour, as Thou seest I have need of; for I commit myself into thy pitiful hands and care, doubting not, fearing not, but saying, with all my trust and faith, O Lord, thy will be done."

Then he bowed his head to the foot of the cross, and wept passionately for some moments, and arose calmed and prepared for the worst. His sister met him at the door of the chamber, and cast herself upon his neck. She could not weep, though the humble prayer had moved her; her mind was in utter and blank despair, which no ray of comfort had penetrated. "My brother!

my brother!" she cried, continually, "how wilt thou bear this?" What hast thou done to deserve this shame he has put on thee?"

"I will bear it, Maria," he said gently, touching her forehead with his lips. "He, our Lord God, endured the shame that He might win the victory, and I fear not, neither shouldst thou fear. The soldiers of Christ and the Church should never flinch from danger. I say to thee, fear not."

"I am but a weak woman," she said, "and women have not the power of men; but even I could bear what is the Lord's will, though against Dom Diego's I should rebel. Is the citation regular and legal?"

"It is both," answered her brother, returning with the document which he had left where he had laid it. "It is both; nay, the purport is even tender, sister; read it yourself. I now go to receive the admonition and instruction of the Holy Council, and they may think I need them. Surely a son of the Church need not fear to meet his fathers in the Lord."

"I know not," she replied, with a shudder. "I know not. When I was at Goa many were led to a fearful death, and——"

"Nay, but dearest sister, it was because they deserved death. Incorrigible sinners and apostates the Church deals fiercely with, as it needs do in a heathen land; but I fear not, and our beloved flock will testify for me; and the translation of the homilies, which no one hath attempted to produce but me, will plead for my devo-

tion to the Church's interests. Nay, Maria, thou shouldst not fear, but the rather rejoice that I have this opportunity of making known what I had too modestly kept back; and thou wilt remain at peace in this our home, and do thy work fearlessly, as thou hast done. It will not be long ere I return in safety, under the Lord's guidance.

"Oh, do not say that," she cried, clinging to him in fear. "Not alone with that fearful priest. Oh, for the love of the Mother Mary, leave me not alone; I dare not stay."

"If thou hadst been summoned, too," he returned, "we could have gone together; but bethink thee of the fierce heat now, and the rain and wind that are to come, to which I dare not expose thee. No, sister, it is well as it is, and in the good Nawab and our own people thou hast protectors enough. What dare *he* do to thee?"

"Perhaps it is idle fear," she said, sobbing, "and I am but a weak woman to bear solitude and anxiety alone; but if thou thinkest it is my duty, I bow to the Lord's will and thine, and will surely do my best."

"Ah!" he returned, with a proud smile, "there my brave sister's spirit speaks out again; and I tell thee, Maria, if he or any-one threatened thee, there is many a sword among our shepherd flock that would be drawn for thee; peaceful as they are, they are yet soldiers to a man, and would defend thee. Fear him not; he dare not hurt thee!"

Maria was silenced, but not satisfied. She did fear the priest. She could not conceal from herself that his foul, sensual admiration of her sometimes overpowered his discretion, and that his looks and demeanour were not those of a priest, but of a dissolute soldier. Still, he had never offended her in speech ; and, except in the affairs of the church, she had held no conversation with him whatever. When he came to the house she invariably withdrew to her chamber, and left her brother and Dom Diego to consult together ; but what virtuous woman could doubt the expression of those burning eyes ? But for these secret fears, fears known only to herself and to God, she would have bid her brother Godspeed, and rejoiced in the prospect of his holy useful labours becoming known to those who could really appreciate them.

Many of the congregation came to them that day, both men and women, and the time passed in prayer and conversation with them, as was usual on the Sabbath ; and both were consoled by the sincere professions of affection made by all, and the assurances of help and protection, if necessary, given by women as well as men.

"We are three hundred stout fellows," said one stalwart old shepherd, who held the office of deacon, "and most of us have seen war in our time, and we are well armed. So fear not, lady, for three hundred good matchlocks can escort you anywhere, were it even to Goa or Beejapoor. Thou art our loving friend, and if

the noble Queen Chand could but see thee, she would take thee to her heart, and the good old Nawab would be thy protector too. Bah!" continued the old man, "with all these to do thy bidding thou needest not fear."

So the day passed; and though her brother could not perform his afternoon duty, Maria went to the church as usual for the service, which, on account of the great heat, had been deferred till evening. She took her guitar with her, for she purposed to teach some of the elder girls a new hymn, and they could only be taught by ear. Only the altar was fully illuminated, and the rest of the church had a light here and there from dim lamps.

Dom Diego performed the service as usual, and apparently departed; and Maria, begging of the sexton to allow her the altar lights for a while, led in a little troop of girls to the altar steps, and sat down there, tuned her instrument, and began the simple music of the hymn. What a voice it was! full, rich, and penetrating, it echoed through the empty building with a peculiar resonance and sweetness. No one could have heard it unmoved. The hymn was a Canarese translation of a Latin one used in the church, and accorded with the music perfectly. Presently, after an interval and directions to the children, she began the air again line by line, and the shriller pitch of the girls' voices required much patient instruction to modulate. At last she

was satisfied, and dismissed them. It was but a step to her house across the small enclosure of the church, and she had no fear of meeting anyone, although it was now quite dark. The day had been very hot, and the fierce hot wind had continued almost without a break from before noon; now it had quite fallen, but the heat had not decreased. All was still around the church, except the cicadas, who kept up their shrill chirrup in the large tamarind trees, and the little grey owls, who seemed to increase their strange twittering hoot as the night advanced.

Maria knew she was alone, for the old man who would put out the lights was snoring in a corner. "One more hymn," she said to herself, as she made a deep reverence to the picture of the Virgin, on which the light shone brightly—"One hymn and prayer to thee, O pitiful, gracious Mother! to whose care I commit him—thy servant—and myself;" and striking a chord on her instrument, and playing a simple prelude, her voice rose through the building with a power and effect of which she was not conscious. Who could have heard it without emotion! But she herself was refreshed, and felt strengthened by the exercise. "And now, sweet Mother," she said, looking up at the picture above her, which almost seemed to smile, "I have sung to thee with all my heart, as I used to sing in my own beloved Portugal; and thou must graciously accept the hymns, and protect us. Good night, sweet Mother. Good night!"

She had spoken aloud, but now her lips moved in silent prayer; and as she stood upon the lower step, with her tiny bare foot resting on the one above it, and her arms stretched out to the picture with closed hands, her exquisitely-moulded figure and attitude were seen in perfection. As she had raised her arms the sleeves of the loose black dress she wore had fallen back nearly to her shoulders, displaying their pure whiteness and rounded contour against the gloom beyond; while the delicate white throat, and soft, bright complexion, stood out in strong relief. Her large blue eyes were raised in a rapt devotion, in accordance with her thoughts. Such faces and such attitudes are seen in the great old masters' religious pictures, but even such as Maria de Fonseca's are rare.

She had finished her prayer, when, as she turned to depart, she saw the figure of Dom Diego standing close beside her, and she shrunk back instinctively and cowered down to the ground.

"Forgive me for disturbing thee, lady," he said; "and I dispense with thy salute to thy superior; but as I sat alone, thy voice—so tender, so sweet—reached me, and I stood at the door till thy vesper hymns were finished. Would I could hear thee more frequently; but thou art chary of thy voice, except to the children, and to thy brother. Why am I excluded, and have to listen in stealth? Nay, I have a voice, too; and, I have heard it told me, a good one. We might join together in some of the old duets of our land, even here among the heathen."

"I pray thee let me pass, Signor," she said, timidly; for he stood between her and the door. He was not dressed in his robes, but in rich black velvet, and wore the plumed hat of a cavalier, which he carried now in his hand.

"Nay, be not hard on me, sweet lady, now that we shall have to spend so much of our time together till thy brother returns from Goa. Thou knowest thou art to be under my pastoral care, and fortunate am I to have so beautiful and so accomplished a companion. Ah, yes! thou wilt be kind to a solitary priest like me, and we can be happy if thou wilt till thy brother returns."

"Will he return?" asked the girl, eagerly. "Is this a true citation? Will he be safe? Answer me, Dom Diego, before the Mother of God, who sees us."

"Nay, if she can see," he cried, sneeringly, "if she can see, she will know what is in my heart. Safe? Thy brother safe? Yet, if thou wilt, he is."

Her pleading face, her hands uplifted to him, as it had been to the Virgin's picture, made him think for a moment that she had yielded to him; and the temptation in that foul heart was sudden and irresistible. "Maria!" he almost hissed between his teeth, "I repeat, if thou wilt, he is safe; but——"

"Speak," she said; "as a priest of the Holy Church give me thy assurance, and I will pray for thee day and night."

"Priest!" he exclaimed, with scorn. "I am a priest when it

suits me to be so, and for the rest a cavalier of the world, like my Jesuit brethren. Love me, Maria," he cried, bending his knee; "love me, as I have loved thee for months in secret, and I can make thy brother pass through the terrors which await him at Goa with safety; but if not, he is a doomed man, and will die at the stake. Ha! ha! for the love of God! Nay, Maria, think me not cruel; 'tis thou who art cruel, my sweet. See, before the Virgin, to whom thou wert crying, I devote myself to thee; I am thine henceforth. If we may not stay here, there is the world before us. India, the Moghul, the Chinese, the sweet Spice Islands, where we may dream away our lives. Europe, if thou wilt, where many a priest like me hath his sweet leman, and no one unfrocks him. Come! I say," he urged tenderly; "come! Thou art young, thou art lovely, thou mightest be a queen. Come! the world is wide enough for us."

The girl's passion had risen with every sentence he spoke, but his utterance was rapid, and she could not speak; her bosom was heaving with scornful emotion, and her bright eyes flashed with angry fire. She was more beautiful in her wrath than in her submission and petition.

"Traitor!" she cried, as he ceased to speak; "perjured priest and liar. Thou hast insulted the Holy Mother; thou hast proposed infamy to her votary; thou hast denied thy Christian faith. I defy thee! I, a poor, helpless widow, defy thee in her name, and spurn

thee. Let me pass, Dom Diego. If I walk barefoot to Goa, those whom thou boastest of shall know this. Yea, if they send me to the stake, I will testify against thee till I die."

"Thy beauteous limbs would fare ill on the wheel," he said, with mock piety. "Thy charms should be seen by another than thy executioner, lady. Dost thou wish thy brother's safety? Do as thou hast spoken, and he dies; listen to me, and he lives. Speak! the last chance resteth with thee." And he drew up his tall figure, and folded his arms on his chest. "Not now," he added hurriedly; "not till he is gone, then thou wilt be alone and I with thee."

Maria could make no reply, her speech seemed paralysed with terror. She essayed to escape, but he stretched out his arms and prevented her, caught her in his own, and strained her to his heart. "Maria!" he said; "Maria!" But with a piercing shriek, which resounded through the church and through the grove, she sank down insensible. "Fool!" cried the priest, "I have betrayed myself, and they or I must die." And he fled out of the building.

Francis d'Almeida had sat musing over the events of the day, and wondering why his sister stayed so long, as the music had ceased. "She may have gone to see Catarina, who is very sick; or—or—but it is late, too late." And as he was thus thinking, the shriek reached him. "'Tis Maria's voice!" he cried, snatching

down his sword from the wall. "What can have happened?" And he ran out.

In the church the altar was still ablaze with light, but no one answered his anxious call. "Maria! Maria! Where art thou?" He dashed towards the altar, where, partly on the steps and partly on the floor, he saw his sister lying insensible. Though at the first sight of her body he had thought her dead, as he gently raised her he felt a strong shudder pass through her, and a plaintive cry escaped her, in which he could only catch Dom Diego's name; and had he appeared he might not have escaped.

"This, then, was that fiend's object," he muttered to himself, as he raised his sister's form and bore it out of the church. "Before God, and before men, I swear he shall answer for this outrage. Courage, Maria! be brave, and have no fear, the miscreant has fled, but he may be found. Come, if thou canst walk; if not, I will carry thee; when thou art in the house thou canst tell me all."

The air had revived her, and the strong arm of her brother was around her; and, though still dizzy, she went on, her brother supporting her till they reached her chamber, where she fell prostrate upon her little bed. For some minutes she could not speak, but as she drank some of the water offered to her, she rose up, and seeing her brother's naked sword in his hand, cast her arms around his neck.

"Not by that, Francis," she murmured, "should he meet

thy punishment. He hath insulted God and the Holy Mother, leave him to them, leave them to chasten his cowardly insult to me; but, oh, brother, we cannot remain here now; let us fly while we have time, and escape from his infamous purposes."

But Francis d'Almeida was not to be restrained; there had been an insult done to his sister, and his gentle nature was inflamed to desperation. Without answering her, he tore himself from her arms and rushed out of the house. He searched every part of the church and the enclosure; he rushed impetuously into Dom Diego's dwelling, but he could not find him, and his servant told him that his master had dressed and gone out some time ago; where, he knew not. Again Francis searched the grove and the adjacent bushes, but there was no one. It was no use searching farther, for Maria might need his aid, and he turned towards his house. As he approached it he saw a number of figures standing near the gate, and for an instant his thought was that there might be danger; but he was relieved by the hearty voice of the old deacon, who cried—

"We are friends, your own people, and are watching the house for you. Come, thou art safe among us; come!" Then the old man took Francis aside and said, "There have been ugly rumours about for several days, O Padré, that some violence was intended against the Lady Maria, your sister; and to-day many Beydurs of Jalhali were seen about the town, who are known to

my clan as bad and desperate characters. Some of my men mixed with them, and one who was intoxicated declared, only just now, that there was a dacoity planned upon your house, which would be attacked before daylight in the morning. So I thought I had better bring some of my lads ; and here are thirty of us, enough to guard thee and them from all danger. Whom dost thou fear? Hast thou any enemy ?"

"None but my superior," he said; "I have no enemy but him."

"Ah!" returned the old man, "and he would possess thy sister."

"Even so, friend," was the reply. "He hath already insulted her, and had I met him ——"

"Thank God," returned the deacon, piously. "Thank God that thou hast not his blood upon thy sword. Let it pass. If thou hast to depart to-morrow, we will guard thee and thine, and watch here till morning, and till we can get a guard of soldiers from the Nawab. Come, see to thy lady sister, for she hath been anxiously asking after thee."

"How can I thank thee enough for this care of us; we are strangers in a strange land, and feel your interest keenly. Ay ! I do thank the Lord that I met him not, else I should have been a murderer."

Maria had heard her brother's voice, and ran out to meet him. "Oh ! thou art safe," she cried; "but I have been miserable.

I prayed, I asked the Holy Mother that thou mightest not meet him, and thou didst not. Oh, say thou didst not, Francis."

"Thy prayer was answered, sister," he said. "I searched for him everywhere, but I did not find him, else, for my blood was hot, I had not spared him. Soldier as he is, I had not spared him, or should have died myself. Oh, I am grateful, Maria, for thy sake, that I met him not. But what shall we do to-morrow if I obey the citation? I must depart to Goa; who can protect thee? Thou canst not remain in the Nawab's family without scandal to thy fair name and the Church, and dire offence to the Inquisition; nay, wouldst thou be safe, even then, among the Moors, who little respect even their own women?"

"I see it," said the girl, sadly, "we have no friends but the Lord and these faithful children of our flock; but my remaining with them would only bring trouble and his vengeance upon them; and if, as the deacon told me, he has allied himself with Beydurs, it is an alliance with the evil one, and in your absence what would become of me?"

"It is all true," said her brother, burying his head between his knees. "Only for the citation I would accept our deacon's offer, who would, doubtless, know of some place of concealment; but I dare not disobey it without danger, even death at the stake. Lord, look thou down upon thy servants, and direct us in thy mercy, for we know not what to do!"

They were both silent for some minutes. At last Maria said, "Let us go to the Nawab and ask his advice. He is kind and wise, and is our local governor, with all temporal powers. His wife, Zeenat Khanum, is my friend, whose kind heart I could not doubt; yet though she would press me to stay with her I could not, brother; thou art right, there would be scandal to me and to the Church, and he, our enemy, would make the most of it. Perhaps he may send us both to Goa, and he hath the power. It is not late yet, brother, and I am now strong. I was not harmed but in heart, brother, when he asked me to be his leman when thou wert gone. Then, indeed, I fainted, and till you raised me I was bereft of sense. Come, now, we linger, we have not long to deliberate; our choice must be decisive;" and throwing her usual scarf over her shoulders, and putting her feet into her sandals, she stood ready, and, with a smile, beckoned her brother on.

"All thou needest is already packed, and old Pedro is ready for his journey. Anna," she said to her attendant, who was Pedro's wife, "do thou pack up what I may need, and be ready."

"Stay," said her brother, as if struck with a sudden thought, 'I will deposit the manuscripts in the sacristy, and the deacon will see that they are kept safely;" and when this was done they set out, escorted by twenty of the shepherds, leaving the deacon, as he said, to watch, and bidding him a loving farewell, with their blessing to all, men, women, and children, whom they loved so dearly, and by whom they were so deeply loved.

The gates of the Nawab's palace, as it was called by the people, were shut, but at the earnest entreaty of Francis they were opened; all knew the good Padré, and the officer on guard saluted the brother and sister respectfully as they passed him. "The Nawab is sitting in the audience room," he said, "playing at chess with a learned Brahmin; but I know you will be welcome: pass on. Need your men wait?"

"Not all of them," said the priest, and, calling out several by name, he bade the rest return to the deacon.

They knew the premises well, and were ushered through the outer court to the inner one, where the Nawab sat, apparently deeply engaged in his game. A woman servant took charge of Maria and led her to the hareem, while the Nawab, rising, saluted Francis courteously, and bade him be seated. "I have nearly beaten my enemy," he said, laughing, "and it has been a stiff fight, so, with your leave, we will finish this game;" and they played on.

"Mât, at last," cried the Nawab; "but never mind, Gunnesh Punt, thou shalt have thy revenge to-morrow; methinks thou hadst too little fear of the pawn which beat all thy forces; but we will not discuss the game now. The Padré Sahib has no doubt come to me on business;" and he ordered in the usual offerings on a guest's departure. Presently all were gone, and he beckoned to the Padré to draw near and speak freely.

"What is this I hear of disputes between you, my friend, and thy new priest, who looks to me more of a fop and dissolute soldier than a peaceful Padré? Speak out fully to me as a friend, and I will help thee if I can."

Then Francis d'Almeida told all; how he had been suddenly cited to Goa to be admonished; how he dare not refuse the summons; and how that enemy, Dom Diego, had made his vile proposal to his sister.

The old nobleman took his flowing beard in his hands and meditated. He had always avoided interference with the affairs of the Mission, and had had no trouble in regard to it while D'Almeida was in charge of it; but he saw things were changed. He had been an ambassador to Goa, and knew of the Council of the Church and the Inquisition, at which he had marvelled, and then blessed God that neither among Mussulmans, nor Hindoos, though they were deemed infidels, could such a thing be. He saw that D'Almeida must go to it, and to dissuade him from doing so would be to give the worst possible advice under the circumstances. The only difficult point was the Lady Maria.

"I could send thee safe, my friend, to Goa," he said, "but the Lady Maria is ordered to remain, and is not safe. My house should be her home, and she is loved by the Khanum and all the children. But, Padré, she is so beautiful; and I have a son, who is now absent, as you know, but who is expected by us in a few

days. I dare not risk a sight of her by him, nor should you, and I speak of her as I would were I truly her father. Let me hear what the women say," he continued. "Do thou remain here, I will not be long away;" and pushing aside a curtain near him, he went into his Zenana.

For some time the priest sat in a very confused state of mind, from which he could see no means of extrication. To take his sister to Goa when the citation forbade it, to risk the chance, having no special friends in the great Council, of accusing his colleague when he himself was under suspension, might be even worse, and would, he thought, be courting self-destruction. To leave the dearest object of his love on earth to the chances which the Nawab more than hinted at, was equally impossible. Whither should he flee? There were other Christian churches he knew in India, but they were far distant, and held heretical tenets. What could he do? He was naturally timid, though brave when aroused, and unable to restrain himself: he wept silently.

Meanwhile the discussion had continued above, partly before Doña Maria, who was surrounded by the children, many of whom had roused from their slumbers, and partly between the Khan and his wife, who was weeping plenteously at the tale of distress. But on one point they agreed perfectly, that to expose the lovely Christian lady to their son's admiration would not only be dangerous, but bring scandal on the family and the Church; while, as

the remedy appeared to be in their own hands, they were bound to provide one. All that Maria could say was that she was ready to face death if needs be, but to remain for further insult by the superior she would not, and death were better.

At last a thought seemed to strike the Nawab. "I have it, I think, now," he said; "the remedy will not be pleasant perhaps to either, but they must be saved, and I think the Padré will agree with me."

"What is it? Ah! what wilt thou do with Maria, tell me?" cried the Khanum.

"I had better not," he said, laughing; "women's wit is sometimes great and ready, but sometimes small, as thine hath been to-night. O wife! if I were to tell thee what hath passed my thought, thou and Maria might set thy wits together and spoil all; but 'tis a sure plan, and bethink thee, wife," he added, gravely, "we must save them from shame and from death," and, so saying, he departed.

"We have been consulting," he said to D'Almeida, when he returned to the audience chamber, "but my wife can suggest nothing, all her wits have departed with poor Maria's, and so far we are as we began; but I think I have a good plan now, and, Inshalla, thou wilt make no objection. I must make State prisoners of ye both for a while."

"State prisoners! and of what are we charged?" said the

priest, drawing himself up proudly. "Do you forget that Portugal can defend its servants?"

"Nay, I mean no offence, Padré Sahib," said the Nawab, laughing; "we all know what Portugal can do when she has a blow to strike. This morning only, as the flood has subsided, I received despatches from the Court, written by the Queen's own hand, the King being absent in the field. You may not have heard of it, but the Prince Ismail rebelled against the King, and, aided by Eyn-ool-Moolk, raised the standard of revolt, and offered to your people at Goa any terms they liked to ask, even to half the kingdom, if they would give him aid in troops and arms, especially in guns. The Queen was much alarmed, and Humeed Khan had marched against the rebels; but it had transpired that intrigues with Eyn-ool-Moolk and the Prince had been carried on with the Church here, and I am ordered to watch it carefully.

"Now, listen further," he continued, as the Padré was protesting his innocence of any political intrigue. "I know thou art innocent as a babe, though the superior may not be, and I shall watch him. I shall put it out of thy power to obey the citation. I shall not separate thee from Maria. I shall place you both in absolute safety, and when thou wilt thou canst fulfil the summons. Thou art not a free agent now, nor shalt thou be, perhaps, for a few months; but ye will be treated with all distinction, and all your expenses will be defrayed. I do not even ask your permis-

sion, but prepare at once to send you to Juldroog, where, from all your enemies, bodily and spiritual, you are safe."

Then he clapped his hands, and by an attendant sent for Peer Mahomed, his secretary and chief scribe. "Write to Jan Beg Risaldar to send fifty horsemen for service here, at the third watch of the night, with two closed litters. Write also to the Nawab Osman Beg of Juldroog to receive the Padré D'Almeida and his sister with honour, and afford them the best accommodation possible. The last, Padré Sahib, I shall write myself to my old friend the Dervish, who lives there, to give ye what ye need freely."

There was no use resisting the Nawab's impetuosity. "As to your effects, do not fear. I will have the house, &c., shut up under attachment, and everything will be safe till ye, as I hope, return to us. Some of your people once there, send for what ye need, and I will despatch one of my own men to see they are brought."

Padré Francis thought of the centurion who had men under his command, and obeyed. His sister came to him, and the Nawab kindly explained what they would have to do. "If our beloved Queen can send for you, 'tis but a short journey, and a special messenger will leave to-day for Beejapoor to tell her what I have done, and that ye are noble, and ye have not only nought to fear, but joy and peace will await ye. Remember, ye are not free agents. I do not ask you to go, but send you hence and for your good."

Then the Nawab embraced him, and as a priest of Jesus

asked his blessing. Maria, with one of the children, lay down to rest; and, as the cool morning air began to blow, Francis d'Almeida was roused from his sleep, as he had laid down, and going to the gate was saluted by the officer in command of the party, a grave old warrior; and on Maria's arrival, closely covered by a shawl the Khanum had insisted on her taking, they entered their litters, and the cortége moved on. It was not more than fourteen miles to the river fortress, and they would arrive before the sun was hot.

CHAPTER V.

A NEW ARRIVAL.

A FEW days had elapsed since, badly wounded and in strong delirium from sunstroke, Abbas Khan had reached the solitary fortress of Juldroog. He was now recovered from the fever, and his arm and breast were partly healed, but not sufficiently to allow of his proceeding to Beejapoor, as he desired to do. Momentous events were passing there. Humeed Khan, his uncle, had routed the rebels, who had supported and encouraged the Prince Ismail in his revolt. The chief of them, Eyn-ool-Moolk, a man who had in turn been true and faithful or rebellious to the kingdom, as his interest seemed to sway him, but whose reputation for consummate ability was believed by all—a man to be feared as well as loved—had been at last killed in action, and his head sent to Beejapoor, and stuck upon a pole opposite to the chief gate of the citadel, a warning to all traitors. The King of Ahmednugger, Boorhan Nizam Shah, was in the field with a powerful army and large train of artillery, intending to strike in with Eyn-ool-Moolk and the young Prince. Ibrahim, King of Beejapoor, himself only a youth, was in the field also, watching his uncle Boorhan's movements, and pre-

pared to check him if he advanced, or succeeded in inducing the Portuguese to join him in a combined movement with Prince Ismail and Eyn-ool-Moolk on Beejapoor. But the whole scheme had been stopped, in its apparently successful course, by the death of one and the defeat of others of the conspirators. The Prince Ismail was in confinement, and the King of Ahmednugger was the last enemy to be dealt with, to give to Beejapoor the rest and peace it had so long yearned for. During the King's absence in the field, the Queen Dowager Chand Beebee carried on the Executive Government, as she had done for the many years of the King's minority, with the same calmness and profound ability she had always shown since she was called upon to take part in public affairs.

On the morning we write of, the Governor of the fort and his guest had risen early, performed their stated devotions, and were sitting in a cloister of the Governor's house, which, for distinction, was called "the Palace." It was a plain edifice, built of hewn granite, stuccoed inside, and contained some few comfortable rooms, but much confined, as the space on which the building had been erected, the very apex of the cone of the hill, was necessarily very limited. Around it were huge masses of smooth granite rocks, in every fantastic form, which rose almost perpendicularly from the river bed on three sides, sloping more gradually to the east, where, on a portion of tolerably level ground, lay the

little town of the fortress. To a lover of natural scenery, if such a person had existed among the unobservant and indifferent Mussulmans who formed the garrison, Juldroog would have been a welcome residence; but Osman Beg, the present governor, was not one of such persons. The son of a distinguished officer in the army of the State, by birth a Persian, he had been unruly and disobedient at home and strongly disposed to intrigue, which had made his presence at the capital somewhat dangerous for him; and the command of Juldroog becoming vacant, he was, as it were, rusticated for a while, and his father held responsible for his fidelity.

He had now been two years in the fortress, and though he had written many penitential letters to his father, and petitions to the King and the Queen Dowager, he had not been relieved. The times were too exciting for a restless spirit like his to be allowed full liberty, and he had been kept at his unenviable post sorely against his will. If the Prince and Eyn-ool-Moolk had succeeded in their enterprise, he would, no doubt, have joined them; and this, from his intimacy with the young Prince, being more than suspected, his petitions for return were, for the present, disregarded.

I have already said that the situation of Juldroog was eminently picturesque and beautiful, but it was beauty of a savage kind. The river Krishna, in the course of ages, in which the great

cataract had been formed, had cut its way through a range of rocky hills which continued northwards and southwards from the brink of the ravine, through which its waters flowed. Throughout the ravine, which was about three-quarters of a mile long, its sides were formed of rugged and precipitous rocks, amongst which there was enough foliage to redeem them from entire savageness. Towards the end of the ravine the fort was situated, evidently a portion of the main range, through which the river had cut its way. Looking from the crest of the cataract above, it seemed as if the giant mass of the fort blocked up the narrow ravine altogether; but at the angle opposed to the river it separated into two branches, one to the north and one to the south. Abbas Khan had crossed over the northern branch, which was comparatively narrow, and at a somewhat steeper incline than the southern, which was more spread out and more full of scattered rocks.

Both branches united at the end of the island thus formed, and the noble river flowed on unbroken, except by low rocky islands covered with wood. In dry weather the stream was reduced to a comparatively small compass, the cataract was divided into many portions threading through the rocks in their white streams, and disclosing the whole of the wonderful construction of the fall, huge masses of granite rocks crossed by veins and dykes of basalt. From the crest of the cataract to the pool beneath, the measure by level of the descent is four hundred and eight feet in

about a quarter of a mile; and, as I have before attempted to describe, the fury of the descending mass of water when the wide river is in flood, is majestic and wonderful in the extreme; but the place is so lonely, so entirely out of the way of ordinary travellers, that few, except the people of the country immediately around, know of its existence.

The young men were sitting together near an archway, which commanded a noble view. To the west was the ravine of the cataract, with the majestic fall now reduced, but still showing sheets of rushing water, and its foaming, agitated passage through the rocky channels and bed of the ravine. The sun had not risen, and the east was full of orange, purple, and crimson clouds rising almost to the zenith, with a pale green streak of clear sky near the horizon. To the north and south the sky was flecked with fleecy cloudlets, which caught, now golden, now crimson, now orange and pink rays, growing fainter and fainter as they receded; but the glory of all was in the centre, which glowed like molten metal, and was reflected in the large pool where the two streams met below. To the east the river pursued its course through a level, fertile plain, its pools and current glistening in the morning light, till it seemed lost among the hills far beyond.

Suddenly the sun appeared to leap into the sky, and for a few minutes his glowing rays touched every object with gold and crimson colour; the hoary pinnacles of the hills beyond the river north and

south, the rocks and foliage of the sides of the ravine, flamed in the brilliant light, the foam of the river seemed to flow in crimson flakes, and the cataract glistened and shimmered like streams of fire.

For a brief while the spectacle was one of extraordinary grandeur and beauty, and even the two young men were affected by it, for both had started up from the soft cushions on which they had been reclining, and were looking out in silence, when, as suddenly as it had broke forth, the sun entered the bank of cloud above it, the gorgeous light faded, and all became dull and grey.

"'Twas a pity it vanished so soon, brother," said Abbas Khan, as he went to his hookah again, and the gurgling murmur succeeded. "'Twas, methinks, like the glance of a beauty's eye, which sets one aflame, and when withdrawn leaves one as grey and desolate as yonder rocks, which a moment ago flashed like jewels. Hast thou often such exhibitions?"

"If I had them every day, Meeah," was the reply, "dost thou think I should waken to see them, or care if I did see them? No; if thou hadst been here two years like me, thou wouldst send thy curse against every rock and tree, against all that roaring water, and most especially against yonder frightful cataract, which for three months in every year seems to clamour at me like a devil; mingles with my dreams if I am asleep, and carried by the wind when it is in flood, the noise and spray even enter here, and

I am deafened and drenched. Thou hast heard of the hell where infidels burn, but this is a water hell for poor fellows like me, who have no friends. For the love of Alla, when thou art at Court again, and of thy brotherly love, say a kind word for me, and get me withdrawn. Surely even our prim Dowager Queen can see no evil in me now. Wilt thou speak for me, O brother?"

"I will," answered the young Khan; "and if they listen to me, we will soon play our jerreeds in the plain before the palace, to be looked at by the Queen mother herself, or her pretty maidens. But tell me, brother, how dost thou spend thy time?"

"Attend," he replied, with mock gravity. "Behold there are no women, so I cannot ogle them, or make love to them. There are no dancers or singers, for they are afraid to cross the river and come up here for fear I should never let them go again. God help me! I never see a woman's face, except when I go down to the old Dervish—who hath a granddaughter like a fairy—and hear the few singers who come to visit the tomb of the old saint on his anniversary."

"Then thou hast seen the maiden, brother?"

"I have seen her but once," he returned. "She came in when I was speaking to the old blind man, but she vanished like a flash of light. By and by she will be of marvellous beauty, and she reminds me of what we have just seen. Hast thou noticed her?"

"I do not know," he said. "I was not in my senses when I was taken to their house; and dreams only linger, now well-nigh forgotten, except the faces of Elias Khan, as I slew him, and a girl——"

"Protection of God!" cried the other. "If one were to be haunted by the face of every man one slew in fair fight there would be no more war—men would fear ghosts, not enemies! So forget Elias Khan, or wait till thy next charmer drive him out of thy head and put something better of her own instead. But to resume my history of myself. I smoke; I drink sherbet when it is hot, and coffee when it is cold, and I eat; and when that is done I begin over again. Sometimes I play at chess with my doctor or the Moonshee. I have letters to write. Sometimes I read Hafiz or Saadi, but only with vexation at the tantalising descriptions they give of nymphs with lotus eyes, ruby lips, cypress waists, ivory necks and bosoms, and wine, which I have none of. Sometimes I ride over to Moodgul and pass a day with the old Nawab, who, I hear, has a marvellously pretty daughter, who will be well dowered; but the old man is too good for me, and the worst of it is, I cannot get to them in private; else there are some choice spirits among the force there with whom time would pass merrily enough. I cannot ask them here, where I have nothing to show them but rocks and tumbling water; and, what is more, they do not care to come.

"If I go to the north side, I am among those unsainted

barbarians, the Beydurs, who shriek and yell like fiends; but I have some good sport at times, and the savages are always ready for a hunt. Once, will you believe it? I made a vow of pilgrimage to Sofy Surmurt's tomb at Sugger (may he have entered heaven), that if he would procure my relief, I would send a hundred rupees to his shrine; but he has not relieved me, and I have not sent it, nor shall I. There, too, the old Naik of Wakin-Keyra waylaid me, and insisted on my staying with him; but the whole was barbarous, and I was afraid of being fed on wild pig; he ate so much of it that I felt polluted by his very touch, and got away. But look! what is that yonder? A party of the Nawab's horse, as I live, from Moodgul; and see, two closed litters, which the bearers have set down. Prisoners, no doubt, of whom I have to take charge. Could he not have kept them himself?"

Abbas Khan could not help laughing at his cousin's doleful account of his life, though he felt its truth, and then an uneasy thought of the sweet girl who had attended him flashed across his mind. Even his cousin, callous and licentious as he was, had remembered the only glance he had ever had of her. But the thought was but for a moment, and before Osman Beg's exclamation passed away, he, too, had risen, and was looking out towards the ferry far below, and the two basket boats in waiting on the river's bank.

"Who can they be?" said the Khan; "ladies of rank evidently,

but from where? The Nawab would hardly send his hareem here, when other ferries are open. Let us go down, brother, and see, it will pass an hour; or they may be State prisoners only. Come "

"Not I," said his cousin, again throwing himself idly on his cushions; "not I. My people will report to me who they are, and it will be time enough to go when there is need; in the evening, perhaps, when the town is in shadow."

So they remained looking out. They saw the boats leave the shore beyond, shoot into the rapid, and carried down; then enter a backwater, by which they were floated up again, finally stopping at a point whence the boats were towed up by ropes close to the town.

"Now we shall soon know," said the Governor, "all about these people; but for my part I am not the least curious; and I object to State prisoners, as I have sometimes to see them beheaded."

"But I am curious," said his cousin; and they sat together for some time in silence.

Then one of the attendants brought in a packet of papers, covered his hands with his scarf, and offered them to his master, who opened them and began to read.

"A Christian priest and a woman," he cried, with derisive laughter. "Now, Meeah, tell me, hath the old man gone mad?

Am I, Osman Beg, master of Juldroog, to guard a priest and a woman?—a Christian priest, a Nazarene, whom may the Lord confound! By the saints, I have a mind to send them back as they came. A Nazarene priest and a woman. Bah!"

"Do nothing of the kind," exclaimed Abbas Khan. "Thou hast not read half the letter; perhaps thou hast forgotten how to read, and needest a scribe to read for thee. Give it to me."

"I see," he continued, after running his eye over the letter. "Señor Francis d'Almeida, of Goa, priest, and Maria, his sister, sent by order of Her Majesty, the refuge of the poor, to be kept under surveillance till she sends for them herself, or gives orders regarding them."

"Hem," said the Governor, gravely, "there may be some mischief even in a Nazarene priest and his sister, and I must see to their good keeping."

"Stay! here is a postscript in the Nawab's own writing; shall I read it?"

"Surely," was the reply. "I can never make out the Nawab's crabbed characters; they are worse than a schoolboy's."

"Here, then, brother, listen. These persons are not to be treated as prisoners. Let them go where they will about the fort; it is enough that they are quietly watched, and not suffered to leave your fort till they are wanted."

"Where, then, can I put them except in the prison?" said the

Governor, with vexation. "If they get away, my head must answer for it. Ho! Ahmed!" he cried; "bid the darogah have the two best rooms in the prison cleaned out, they are good enough for these Christian swine."

"May I be your sacrifice, O Nawab," said Ahmed, joining his hands, "but they are already provided with lodging. The priest had a letter with him, and took it to the Dervish. His child read it, and the old man came out and bid them welcome in the name of God. Are they to be removed to the prison?"

"No!" shouted the Governor; "let them remain where they are. By the Prophet," he continued to his companion, "a Christian priest, a holy Syud, and a woman; was there ever the like before? What can it mean?"

"Never trouble thine addled head about them," said the young man, laughing; "let them be where they are, and treat them well."

"And the priest is one beloved by every man in Moodgul," added the attendant, in the brusque manner common to many confidential Indian servants; "and the lady, Doña Maria, is an angel of goodness and beauty, and the poor adore her; so be kind to them, my master."

"Then thou shalt look after them thyself, O blockhead. Go, see that they get rations of all they require; will that satisfy thee? Go! Will that satisfy thee, too, Meeah?" he added; "wilt thou have them up here with us? The girl is an angel I have heard from many, and——"

"Peace with thy ribaldry, cousin," said Abbas Khan, gravely. "They are holy people committed to thy hospitality and care; wouldst thou break those ties sacred even to Nazarenes?"

"Nay, I have done, Meeah," returned his cousin. "Thou art too good for me. I swear to thee they are my brother and sister henceforth; can I say more? Let them be, and tell me how thou camest across Elias Khan, and how thou slew him. It will turn our thoughts away from the priest and the beautiful Maria, and thou hast not told me yet."

"It is not a pleasant subject to tell thee of," said his companion; "but I have to tell it to all who may ask me. You know Elias was an Abyssinian."

"Yes, Meeah; but far removed from the parent stock. If I am right, we were both his relatives, though we are Dekhanis."

"Distantly," was the reply; "but listen. I was at Korla with my cavalry, to watch the ford there against Eyn-ool-Moolk's marauders, when one day my spies brought me word that my uncle's force was pressing on to Belgaum, and I determined to join him, as everything was quiet where we were, and my spies, out in all directions, said there was not an enemy within fifty coss. I marched, then, early one morning, the morning of the day I came here, before daylight; but before we had proceeded more than a little distance, there was an alarm in front, some shots were fired, and in galloping up to the head of the men, I met Elias, with a cloud of his horse-

men charging furiously. There was no time for flight, even had I been a coward, so as I had a few men with me I charged right at Elias, and called him by name. The confusion and the war cries, Dekhan and Abyssinian, were frightful; the light was as yet very dim, but I saw him when he was close to me, and cut at me with all his power, beat down my guard, and wounded me, as you know. I had not time to feel sick or faint, but struck at him with all my force. Had he worn his usual chain armour, I had failed, and he would have slain me; as it was, I clove him through the shoulder, and he dropped from his horse dead, but his frightful curse as he received my blow, and his scowl of hate, haunt me still.

"When I looked round there were only three men with me, and one was badly wounded, my brave Jumal, who died at Narrainpoor the day after we arrived there of the heat and his wound, and Runga Naik, who was wounded also, but I did not know that at the time. All the rest of my fellows, pursued by ten times their number of Abyssinians, were flying for their lives, and the fight had gone away some miles. I could only hear the shouts as we at last proceeded. There was no place of refuge but Juldroog, and it was now clear to me that the rebels had crossed the river somewhere in the night before the flood came down, with the intention of cutting off my party, which, weak as it was, they would easily have done in a surprise. It was a long and weary ride, cousin, and the heat and the dust were frightful, and you know my condition when I arrived."

"A fair fight, a fair fight between you, and you won it, my brave brother. The worst of it is that Elias Khan was the chief of a large faction of the Abyssinians, and they will make a party quarrel of it. You will have to be careful when you get back to Beejapoor, and guard against surprise and treachery; but so, indeed, has everyone nowadays."

"I do not fear that," returned Abbas Khan, quickly; "but what I do fear is that my conduct may be misrepresented. It may be said that I fled and left my poor fellows to their fate; and if that time come it would have been better had I died of heat and thirst. One is already dead; one is still with me, and brought away my standard, and he and Runga Naik are the only two who saw what happened."

"But your wound is a witness, Meeah; and I am one also, when thou wert sick to death; and the old Dervish and his child as well."

"Ye all know that I came and was in truth sick unto death, but ye did not know how I had come, or why."

"But thy uncle, our uncle, Humeed Khan, thou art sure of him; and now he has overcome Eyn-ool-Moolk and the Prince, he will be high in favour with the King, and no one could oppose him."

"Alas!" returned the youth, "our uncle is a stern man, and if he thought I had done a dastardly or cowardly act, would slay me with his own hand. It is not death that I fear, but dishonour,

which is worse than death. That it is that preys on me, and that is why Elias comes often to me and cries, 'Thou shalt die!'"

"He was a devil in life and he is a devil in death," said his cousin with a shudder. "Bethink thee, brother, hadst not thou best have his evil spirit exorcised and made to quit thee? The old Dervish is a holy man; hundreds come to him for charms and amulets, and he can give thee one against Elias and all other evil spirits; nay, even against the Shytán himself! We will send word to him, and go down in the cool of the evening. Canst thou walk so far?"

There is no Indian Mussulman who, more or less, does not believe in the worth of charms and amulets against the effect of the Evil Eye; and there are none who do not believe in the malignity of evil sprites and demons who, wicked in life, have taken possession of innocent persons. In the Dekhan and south of India generally this belief is peculiarly strong, and it would have been impossible that Abbas Khan should not have shared a superstition which was so universally prevalent among all classes of the people.

"Yes; I will go, brother," he said, "but not to-day, for my soul is heavy. The old man's guests, too, are hardly settled, and he will have too many cares for them to think of me. So let us have a game at chess, and this cloud may pass away. My wound,

too, is painful, and I would have rest, instead of a rough walk over your rocks."

"By all means, Meeah, let us play. There is thunder in the air, and there will be rain, and therefore thou art suffering. When thou art at ease we can go; till then, the Dervish and his guests are best left to themselves." And the cousins betook themselves to their game.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORM AND THE FLOOD.

MEANWHILE, the good Padré and his sister, having been ferried over the river, as already mentioned, and their litters removed from the boats, looked around in amazement at the wild and impressive scene before them. High above, the fantastic rocks of the gloomy fortress towered majestically, and bastion after bastion revealed itself among them, glowing in the rising sun, and by its ruddy beams bereft awhile of their actual grimness. Below, the small village, with its half-ruined walls, seemed astir; for cattle and goats issued from the gate enveloped in clouds of dust, attended by shepherds, who drove them forth to graze on the level ground at the lower point of the island.

A company of women, with bright water-pots on their heads, were going for water, and some people had collected in groups to watch the unusual sight of the strangers' arrival. Among them were some of the Governor's attendants, to one of whom the officer from Moodgul explained who the priest and his sister were, and, delivering his letters, bade the Padré a courteous farewell, and proceeded to return; while the attendant, after a few civil questions,

bidding the litters to be taken to a shady spot under some tamarind trees, accompanied the party.

"Can you tell me where the Dervish, who lives here, resides?" asked the priest of the man, who appeared civil.

"Certainly," he replied, "it is close by. Come with me and I will call him."

Zóra answered to the summoner, and the priest, taking off his hat, saluted her. He could not help being struck with the extreme beauty of the girl. "Can you speak Canarese?" he asked, "for I have a letter here for your father."

"He is my grandfather," she said, modestly, "but if you will give me the letter I will read it for him, for he is blind." Then the girl retired with it, and in a few minutes returned, leading the old man by the hand, saying, "Abba, this is the Padré Sahib; speak to him."

"You are welcome, Sir, to my poor house, in the name of the God we both worship, and in the name of Jesus and his mother. Your friend, the Nawab, asks me to give you shelter for a few days, and I do so with pleasure. My house is your own, if you can put up with scant room and such attendance as we can supply; my child, Zóra, must be your hostess. Where is your sister?"

"Close by," said the priest, "under the trees; I will bring her to you."

"Maria," he said, as he opened the curtain of the litter, "I have

seen the old Dervish, who is kind and hospitable. He has offered us shelter, as the Nawab said he would; and he has one of the brightest and sweetest-looking of grandchildren, whose very smile will cheer you. Come! I will see to our baggage and dismiss our escort."

"O gentle lady!" cried Zóra, clapping her hands and advancing to greet her guest as she passed the threshold, "surely thou art as beautiful as an angel;" and the girl's face was expressive of her wonder and admiration.

Her large, liquid eyes were dilated to the full; her lips open, showing her white glistening teeth; and her first look of amazement had expanded into a beaming smile as she stretched forth her arms to embrace her guest. Nor was Maria slow to express her confidence, and took Zóra in her arms and held her to her heart in a warm embrace.

"I shall be a trouble to you," she said, "and I cannot speak Persian like my brother."

"But you speak my own language, you speak Canarese, lady, like a Brahmin; but see, there is my grandfather, he would welcome you, too."

"Would that I had eyes to see thee, lady; but thou art welcome truly," said the old man kindly, and feeling in the air for his guest.

"Let him put his hand on thy head, lady," said Zóra, "'tis that

he wishes to do ;" and she guided her grandfather's hand to Maria's head.

"May God and the Holy Mother of Jesus keep thee, my child," he said reverently. "If thou art in trouble, or pain, or grief, thou wilt find peace in this poor house, and Zóra will love thee, and watch thee. That soft silky hair of thine is not of Hind, but of Europe, and thou wilt tell me of thy sweet country."

Maria had removed her hood, and her fair, silky hair was clustering about her neck and shoulders. She had never looked more lovely than at this moment; the rich complexion glowing with excitement and pleasure; her fair white throat rising out of her kerchief of fine white muslin, as she stooped down to receive the old man's blessing of welcome; and as he put Zóra's hand into hers, he said, "Take her, and guide her, for she is alone."

"Come, lady!" said Zóra, "I will show thee where thou wilt live. Long ago, they say, my grandmother and my mother lived there; but the place is too large for me alone, and my old servant and I live in a room apart, near my grandfather. Come and see!"

They passed through a room, which was used as a kitchen, and entered a small court, which had low cloisters all round, from which doors opened to apartments within. The whole was small, but exquisitely neat and pure; and in the centre was a plot in which were some purple amaranths, marigolds, and other

common flowers, and some bushes of several kinds of jessamine.

"These are my flowers," she said, "and I love them so; and yonder is a vine, which gives us grapes in the cool weather; and one fig-tree, which shades me from the sun; and I love to sit here and read, and feed my pigeons and the birds that come to me. And they know me so well now, even the parrots and mynas, though they are wild. Coo! coo!" she cried, raising her voice, as a flock of beautiful pigeons flew in, and alighting, pressed round her. "They belong to the mosque, you know, lady, and no one molests them."

"Call me Maria now," said the lady. "There should be no veil or restraint between us."

"But I am only a poor orphan," she said.

"As I am also," Maria returned, sadly, "and a widow, too."

"Thou a widow, and so young and so beautiful?" said the girl. "May I love thee, and serve thee? See! the pigeons are not afraid of thee, nor am I."

"We will love each other," said Maria, gently stroking the girl's head. "And if we stay ——"

"Oh, you will not depart," said Zóra, pitifully, "and leave me alone again! I have seen you only to love you, and without you all would be dark. I have had no world but this to live in, and I was happy; but now you are come from a far country, and brought

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with you a joy my heart has never known. Ah, yes, the Mother Mary would not take you away from Zóra! And now see," she continued more gaily, "here are your brother's rooms, and a door to go out by to the mosque, if he wishes, and whithersoever he pleases; and a room for your servants, which can be your kitchen. No one will come near you, and you can do as you please."

The apartments were indeed ample for all purposes, and when the priest had got up their few possessions, and the two old servants, Pedro and Joanna, had arranged them and their own, the rooms lost the bare, uninhabited look they had had at first, and became cheerful and comfortable. Zóra's old servant had prepared an ample repast of omelette and kicheri, to which the travellers did justice after their night journey.

The morning had been oppressively hot, and indeed all day the sun's rays had beaten down upon the narrow valley and its bare granite rocks with an intensity of heat hardly supportable, yet the court had remained refreshingly cool. In the evening, however, the radiation from the rocks increased the heat, and the brother and sister betook themselves to the terrace of the court and looked around them. Heavy clouds were gathering overhead, and flashes of lurid sheet lightning every now and then seemed to spring from their depths and rush across the sky, lighting up the grim fort for an instant, and again leaving all darker than before. Low mutterings of thunder came down the ravine, accompanied by fitful

gusts of wind, which again ceased, and all was still; but the darkness grew more intense, till not even the fort or the rocks could be seen.

Maria was no coward of the elements, and she and her brother watched the sublime progress of the storm which was evidently approaching, with intense interest, hardly speaking. A few large plashing drops of rain fell on them, and warned them to retire, but they only rose and gazed around. The low moaning of the cataract above came down in the still silence, and the river murmured with a kind of measured plash among the rocks; there was not a breath of wind to stir the flame of the small lamp which burned below, and the very suspense was fearful.

Suddenly a heavy shower fell, with an almost sulphurous odour, forcing them to retire, when, and as if that had been the signal, a stream of forked lightning burst from the clouds which hung, as it were, immediately over their heads, illuminating in a ghastly manner the fort, the town, the river, and hills beyond; yet but for an instant only, one which was never forgotten, for thunder crashed above them. Peal after peal broke over the ravine of the fort, and was re-echoed among the rocks and wild hills with tremendous and deafening roar, which for a time was almost continuous.

Brother and sister performed their evening devotions, thankful for the shelter they enjoyed; and when Francis had withdrawn to

his room, Maria sat long, meditating over the events at Moodgul and their consequences, grateful for having escaped violence, the cause of which, but for Dom Diego's uncontrollable passion, she would not have been aware; thankful, too, for shelter in their trouble to both.

Whether they were to be prisoners, or whether guests, she knew not; but at least they had found friends who seemed real and sincere, and anything, even a prison, would be welcome rather than the ordeal of the Inquisition, or the dangers of her own once happy home. What the end might be, whither she might be led, she had no thought, for all the future was dark; but she could rest her hopes on Jesus and his Holy Mother, and in sure faith in both, she knelt down before her crucifix and prayed fervently.

As she prayed she heard the door open softly, and amidst a glare of lightning which soon ceased, the terrified face of Zóra appeared, pale and anxious. "Forgive me," she cried, as she entered, "but I was frightened by the thunder and lightning, and have come to thee. Abba sleeps soundly, and I was alone; may I stay here with thee till the storm is past?"

"Thou art welcome, child," said Maria, gently; "lie down on my little bed, and I will be with thee presently. It is truly a fearful night, but God protects us. When I have finished my prayer I will come to thee."

Then Zóra lay down, and covered herself closely at first, but

now and again peered out, her large eyes distended with wonder as she watched the Christian lady's simple devotions. "She prays," she thought, "and yet men say Christians are godless and infidel; but they are false and wicked who say so."

After a little while Maria rose, combed out her silky hair, divested herself of her upper garments, and after her usual ablution, kissed the child, and lay down beside her; and though the thunder still roared and the lightning flashed, sleep came to them as they lay locked in each other's arms: thus they rested peacefully, while the thunder clouds passed away down the river to the east, dispensing their cooling and fertilising influences far and wide, and the stars shone out with a dewy brilliance over the fort, the river, and the ever-moaning cataract. It was the opening of the monsoon.

In the early morning they awoke. Zóra raised herself on her arms, and looked with earnest eyes on her companion. "How beautiful thou art, Maria," she said, as she smoothed the soft hair from her brow; "and how fair, and thy cheek like a pale Oleander flower. Alla pity thee, and protect thee!"

"I have rested well," said Maria, smiling; "I do not think we awoke for all the thunder, and now 'tis calm and fresh. When it is time, if thou wilt, we will go abroad for awhile. I am used to do so, alone at Moodgul, for I had many sick people to look after who expected me. Thou art not afraid?"

"Oh, no!" returned the girl. "I, too, have sick people in the village, and I will show them to thee. I am not afraid, and every one is kind to me, even the rough soldiers salute me; and I had such sweet dreams, Maria. Angels of Paradise seemed to be tending me, and there were flowers around me, and all because I lay in thy arms like a child."

"Would thou wert a child of hers, Zóra," and Maria pointed to a little picture she had hung beneath the crucifix; "but go now, and when thou art ready come for me. See, there is my old servant to help, and I will not delay. And how hast thou passed the night, Joanna?" she asked. "A good day to thee."

"We barely slept," said the old dame, in the broken snuffling Portuguese spoken by the lower orders of Goa. "We shut the door, and the lightning would come in, whether or no. It used to be bad at Goa, but this seems worse; the saints help us. How are we to get away from this terrible place, where the rocks seem ready to fall on us and crush us, and the fort looks like a gloomy prison? Yet thou hast a smiling face, Señora; dost thou not fear?"

"No," said Maria, "I dread nothing; and these new friends, whose guests we are, seem truly kind; why should we fear?"

"No, mistress, the house is well enough, I allow. There is a bathing-place for thee inside, and I have water ready, and the cocoa-pot is simmering, and——"

"But where is my brother; hath he not risen, Joanna?"

"Oh, yes!" returned the dame; "he rose about daylight, for a soldier came from the fort and said the Governor wished to see him before the sun was hot, and he thought it best to go, so he went with the men—for there were several—and said he would be back as soon as he could, and you were not to be anxious, for the messengers said he was to come without apprehension, for he would be taken care of, and sent back." But notwithstanding Joanna's assurance, a thought of possible treachery and a dungeon floated into Maria's mind. Yet she remembered the civil messages of the day before, and the ample allowance for maintenance which had accompanied them.

"And there is plenty to eat, Señora," continued the dame, when she brought the cup of warm cocoa, after Doña Maria had bathed, "plenty. There are two lambs and many fowls, and rice, and butter, and spices, and flour, salt, and cocoa nuts, and coffee, and sugar, and sugar candy, and plantains, and eggs, and——"

"Enough, enough!" cried Maria, laughing outright; "why there is more than we could eat in a month, Joanna."

"And the man told Pedro that this was to be the daily allowance, and he would bring it every morning. He is a Brahmin, scribe, I think, for he had a pen stuck into his turban. I will bring him to you when he comes, and you or the Señor can tell him what you please; and when you come in, a good breakfast will be ready for you and the master, I can tell you."

"I am troubled to hear about all the food that has been sent us by the kind Governor," said Maria to her young friend, when Zóra entered. "What are we to do with it?"

"You can give it to the poor if you can't eat it all, lady," replied the girl. "It is because you are great people that the Nawab has sent a feast for you, and you will get it every day. Ah! he is rich, and the Government is rich, and will never miss it; but come, the Señor is gone up to the fort to see him, and we may meet him as he returns."

So they went out towards the village. The sun was rising veiled in clouds, which, as the remainder of the storm, lay in a dark bank far behind the distant hills which bounded the horizon. The slight breeze was fresh and cool, the rocks glistened, wet as they were, in the light, all the birds—mynas, paroquets, and others—flew about, chattering and calling to each other, and there was a clearness and transparency of the air which revealed rock and tree, hill and ravine, with far greater distinctness than on the previous day when they had arrived. How beautiful it all seemed to Maria.

"And what is that sound I hear?" she asked of her companion; "sometimes it is loud, sometimes a low murmur. Is it the river?"

"Yes," replied the girl, "it is the river. Not far above, the water falls over a great rock as high as the hill yonder, with a terrible foam and clamour, and you can see it from yonder bastion. It is

not far from here, and I often go there when the water is in flood to look at it."

"Alone!"

"Oh, yes, alone! I am only Zóra, and no one minds me. Sometimes one of the soldiers we know, Ahmed, comes with me if he sees me, and says I ought not to go alone, and tries to frighten me about the panther which sometimes comes here; but I never saw one. Now here we are in the village, what do you think of it?"

It was a poor place; the main street contained a few shops where grain and flour, butter and spices, were sold, and some of the soldiers of the garrison were grouped about them, most of whom saluted the two girls civilly enough. The rest of the houses belonged to weavers and cultivators who had fields at the end of the island, or had lands across the river, which, except in the highest floods, they could cross at any time on their floats of gourds. Many of the houses were comfortable and in good order, and their dames standing at their doors were well clad, and welcomed them with kindly greeting.

We will not follow the companions on their little tour. Zóra had several sick people to visit, chiefly women and children; but it was easy to see how much she was beloved by all. Maria was soon at her ease among them; her sweet face, the softness of her manner, and the perfection with which she spoke the Canarese tongue, charmed and affected many deeply. Indeed, most of them knew

her and her brother by report, and some had even seen them when they went to the Moodgul fair. To some Maria promised her own medicines, and invited others to come and tell their ailments to her brother, for the medicine chest had not been forgotten, and long practice and reading had made Francis d'Almeida a skilful physician.

They were returning through the little bazaar, when Maria heard her brother's voice calling, as it were, from above, "Maria! Maria!" The sound seemed in the air, and on looking up she saw him descending by a steep pathway. "Wait!" he cried, and was presently with them. He told them that though he had obeyed the Nawab's summons with some misgiving, yet he had been received kindly and courteously; and though he might be delayed a short time till instructions arrived regarding him, he must remain at his ease without apprehension, and that the whole fort was free to him to come and go as he pleased. "And it is the most wonderful place you ever saw, sister," he continued. "The view up the ravine of the river is glorious; and though there is not water enough now to fill the cataract, it is still surprisingly beautiful, and I will take thee to see it some day. The Nawab has a guest, too, a cousin, in whom I am much interested. He is suffering from some delusion, which, I think, I can remove by tonics, and he is to come to me this evening to consult with me. He was wounded, too, in some battle, but the wound is very nearly healed.

I will put a simple dressing on it, and he will be fit to travel in a week.' I was much interested in him, for he is a brave and modest youth, with a stamp of greatness about him which the Nawab lacketh, who is altogether of a coarse type; but he was kind nevertheless. I have enjoyed the climb and walk greatly, Maria, and am hungry for my breakfast;" and they passed on.

At the entrance to his dwelling their venerable host met them, with anxious inquiries about their health and comfort; and Zóra told him how they had already visited her sick folk, and how the Señora had won all hearts, and the children hung about her; and as the old man was praising her, Maria simply said,

"I am vowed to good works, and have renounced the world, Sir. This is only my daily care, to be fulfilled wherever I may be; and it rejoices me to find Zóra so efficient a guide. The people all love her, and so do I already."

"Nor will she fail you, lady," returned the Dervish. "She is the light of these sightless eyes now, and is all that is left to me on earth. But go, you will be hungry. I only hope you and your good brother have all you need."

He said this with a combined dignity and courtesy which struck Maria forcibly. "Surely he is no ordinary Fakeer," she thought; "perhaps some great person who, weary of the world, has taken refuge here, and Zóra, I dare say, will tell me."

It was in the afternoon when Zóra came into Maria's room,

where she was busy copying some of her brother's translations. "Come," she said, "there is no sun, and we can walk to the bastion. I know a short way by a postern; and Ahmed is here and will go with us, and your brother will come also."

"Yes, he will come, and it will be so pleasant to have a stroll with him; we always go out together."

"We must not be long away," he said, "for I expect the Nawab's cousin at sunset, and would not fail him."

"No! we need not even be so long. They say the panthers come out as the sun goes down," said Zóra, laughing gaily, "but we never met any of them, did we, Ahmed?"

The bastion could not be seen from where they were below, and they followed a path behind one of the curtain walls of the fort; but as they got round a shoulder of the hill the ascent grew steeper, and turning a corner of the wall the bastion stood before them. It was built on a high, isolated rock, one side of which could be ascended by steps that rose from the ground. The rock completely shut out the view up the ravine, and the curtain wall that of the river; but they could hear it roaring and dashing against the rocks far below. It was evident that the whole ravine above could be seen from the bastion, and Zóra, leading the way, bounded fleetly up the steps.

"There," she cried, helping Maria up the last one; "look! but the rocks are not half covered with water."

The wildness of the scene before her, and its extreme beauty, caused Maria to start back and almost feel dizzy; but Zóra held her by the hand. "Do not tremble," she said, leading her up a small circular platform on which there was a long iron swivel gun placed. "Sit down on the gun here, and shut your eyes, as I do, then you will not tremble when you open them."

Maria followed the girl's advice, and waited for a few moments; then she looked out. The gun was raised some feet above the parapet of the bastion, and the view around was completely clear. The stream dashed against the foot of the rocks, more than a hundred feet below, rebounding among other rocks in its bed, throwing up waves and spray, and rushing down the gorge with violence.

Above, to the left hand, she could see where the hill was cut in two by the point of the island, which ascended nearly perpendicularly for hundreds of feet; but of all, the bed of the river above the fall, the sides of the ravine, and the huge cataract itself at the end were the most impressive. Maria sat in a sort of trance, unable, for several minutes, to speak, clasping Zóra's hand as the girl nestled to her. Zóra said, "Is not that God's power? I thought you would not speak. I can hardly breathe sometimes when the flood comes down. Ah!" she cried, with a half shriek, "look, it is coming; but do not be afraid, we are quite safe here. It is last night's rain."

Maria looked up to the crest of the fall, which, such was the clearness of the air, seemed to be quite close. She saw a swell of water gradually rising over it. It appeared to move slowly at first, but as the momentum and the body of water increased in volume, it dashed down the rocks with irresistible fury and velocity, foaming, sending up clouds of spray, and roaring with a sound deeper than thunder.

Gradually the whole of the crest was covered by the flood which, pausing as it were in the great pool below, now rolled in majestic force down the ravine in a seemingly compressed column, rising every moment. The effect of this huge mass of water in the comparatively confined space was very singular, and almost indescribable, for it appeared to grow in height every moment, and, thundering down before them, to look almost as if it would overwhelm them; but there was a fascination in the superb sight that was irrepressible as the torrent came on, its crest feathered with white foam, while it seemed to lick up the huge rocks and boulders in the bed, to rush into the hollows of the ravine sides in furious waves, and gradually to fill the whole gorge with tumult.

Presently they saw the foremost wave strike against the base of the fort and divide, the chasm beneath them becoming filled by the torrent.

"The flood seems rising up to us, doesn't it?" cried Zóra, clapping her hands; "that's what I like to feel, sister; but it could not,

you know, we could escape up there;" and she pointed to the rocks above, "and the good Alla would not let it carry us away. But what is that? Ahmed, Ahmed! what is that?" and with wide distended eyes she looked at a spot on the side of the hill, only a little distance from them, pointing at the same time, "What is that?"

A panther had crept out from its den under a rock, and after stretching itself, yawned and gave a slight growl, then looked about warily, and seeing the group on the bastion, crouched as if to spring.

"If I had but brought my gun," said Ahmed in a whisper. "Do not notice the brute, he will not attack us. Oh! if I had but my gun."

Almost as he spoke a shot was fired from behind a bush at a short distance, which stood near one of the zigzag paths which led up the ascent. The panther staggered for a moment, then sank to the ground with a scream, and falling, rolled down the steep bank below him on to the pathway, quite dead.

"A good shot! well fired!" exclaimed Ahmed, as he prepared to descend the steps from the bastion, while a voice cried from above, "Take care, Ahmed! take care! he may not be dead!" But Ahmed hurled down a large stone, followed by several others, which hit the carcase; but it did not move, and he cried to the man above, "Come down, it is quite dead."

Then a small party emerged from the position they had taken up behind some rocks, which consisted of the Nawab and his cousin, and several attendants.

"We saw you from above," said the Nawab, saluting the Padré courteously, "but we did not like to disturb you. May we come down?"

"I do not like him," said Zóra, clinging to Maria; "he always looks at me when I chance to meet him, and his eyes are evil. Let me be near you. Oh that he would go away. Why does he intrude upon women?"

But Osman Beg and his companion, after inspecting the dead animal, ascended the steps and were soon among the little party.

He did not address Maria, but saluted her courteously; and of Zóra he took no notice, save by some furtive glances from time to time.

"It is well we came down by the path yonder, or that brute might have alarmed your sister," he said to the Padré; "but it is fortunate for me that I have the unexpected pleasure of seeing her. Perhaps she will accept the claws of the panther in memory of this incident; they make a pretty necklace, and shall be cleaned and sent to her. I cannot dare to ask her to my poor house, but she has seen the flood from here, which is grand to-day."

"It is, indeed, wonderful," replied Francis, curtly. He did not

like the manner with which the Nawab regarded his sister. "But we cannot stay now, it grows late. May we depart?"

"Nay, Señor, it is I that should depart, and leave you to enjoy yourselves; but my cousin has promised a visit to you, Sir, and the Dervish, and he will accompany you, if you have no objection, with two or three men, in case more panthers may be abroad. So I will take my leave of you, Señor; may you reach your house safely." And, descending the steps, they watched him ascend the path by which he had come.

Abbas Khan, though he had not seen Zóra since his night of delirium, yet remembered her perfectly, and his eyes beamed with delight.

"It was such a flood as this when I was brought across this torrent, wounded and sick almost to death," he said very quietly to Zóra. "Hast thou forgotten it? It was thy face then that I saw as an angel's, who gave me cool sherbet of Persia; and I would have come to thank thee and the old man, but I was too weak till now. Dost thou remember?" he added, after a short pause; and as she did not speak, "I remember thy name—Zóra, is it not?"

"I have not forgotten," she said, looking up to him timidly with her soft eyes, and then casting them to the ground; "I remember all, and we thought thou wouldst have died."

"I have no remembrance save of thee, Zóra," he continued, tenderly; "only an angel seemed to visit me, and soothe me. Then

Runga Naik came, and . . . . but it is all a dream, for I knew little more till I was taken to the palace, where I have since been, except that an old man with a long white beard visited me often, and a servant brought food. Where wert thou?"

But she did not reply.

"Come, then," he said to the Padré; "come, the evening draws in; and, as my cousin says, we may perchance see more panthers;" and after a lingering look around her, Maria rose, and followed Zóra down the steps, for the continuous roar and turmoil of the waters oppressed her.

Almost at the foot of the steps lay the dead panther, its glossy skin flecked with blood stains, and its eyes glaring and glassy. The claws had been cut off, but the skin was perfect. "'Twill make a good carpet for Abba," he said to Zóra, "and I will send some men to skin it presently."

CHAPTER VII.

CONFIDENCES AND FAREWELLS.

"O SISTER, I have seen him once more!" cried Zóra, as she flung her arms round Maria's neck, when they had reached the privacy of her room. "I have seen him, and he looked kindly upon me, and has not forgotten me. Oh, sister, I am so happy!"

"Who is he?" asked Maria; "and how camest thou to know him?" she said in some surprise. "Is he thy betrothed?"

"Oh, no," replied Zóra, shyly. "I have no betrothed; if I had he would not speak to me, nor I to him, till we were married. But I have no betrothed; I am only Zóra yet, and I shall never change. Who would ask for a Fakeer's child but a Fakeer? and I would not go. No, I am with Abba now, and while he lives I will not leave him."

"And after that, Zóra?"

"I do not know. Whatever is in my fate will surely come," she said, simply. "I hear of many good women who live by good deeds, and even my poor people here would not let me go."

"And thou hast no relatives, no friends?"

"None in all the world, lady," said the girl, with a sigh. "No

one but the good Abba, and he always keeps me safe. I have no one but Abba in all the world, and he is very old now, and often tells me he shall die soon; but I pray to Alla that he may live many years—oh, many years! And I shall have no care. But did you not see, sister, *he* remembered me. Ah, yes," she continued, her eyes flashing with excitement, "he had not forgotten me, though I saw him only one night, and they would not let me go to him next day; and I never saw him again till the panther was killed, and then I dare not look at him."

"And who is he?" asked Maria, with some curiosity. "Tell me; thou art not ashamed, Zóra."

"I am ashamed only to myself," she replied. "I only think of him sometimes as he lay shouting his war cry, and cowering down as he cried, 'Elias! Elias! away, away, to hell!' I don't know who he is, but they call him Abbas Khan; and Runga Naik told me he was a brave soldier, although so young, and his uncle was a proud warrior at Beejapoor, in the good Queen Chand's favour; and he is an orphan like me, sister. That is all I know."

Did the Señora remember the first dawning of love to her own gallant soldier husband in the far-off home-land of her youth, where he had wooed her and won her? Perhaps she did, as her heart softened to the girl, and she took her in her arms, and laid her head on her own breast. But she said naught of love; what Zóra had said was but a premonitory symptom, if, indeed, it was even that.

"Yes, it is pleasant to be remembered," she answered, "especially when one has tried to do a kindness. But he is a noble of rank, and will go away to his people and leave thee here. Why shouldst thou think of him?"

"Yes," she said, sadly. "I did not think of him before, but I was so happy; and now, if he had not spoken kindly to me, I should not have cared. He would have been as others who have come and gone. Ah, well! it is my fate, my fate; and when Abba is gone there is no help for me but Alla;" and she burst into a flood of tears, while Maria held her to her breast and soothed her.

"There, it is gone now," she said, half sobbing. "Forgive me, sister, that I was so foolish;" and she looked up with a bright smile, though her eyes were wet with tears. "And you will not forget the river, and the cataract, and the foaming, whirling waters?"

"No, indeed, Zóra," she said, with almost a shudder; "but it was almost too terrible. Hark! how it thunders now, and the river roars!"

"We who live here," returned Zóra, "are accustomed to it, and seldom heed it; but I love it at its wildest, and Ahmed and I often go to the bastion and sit there wondering till I can hardly get away, and sometimes even weep. Think, lady, it was in such a flood as that that Runga Naik brought him here; but it was the good Alla that protected him, and it was not his fate to die."

"You promised me you would not think of him, Zóra!"

"Only when the flood comes, lady; then, indeed, I cannot help it, perhaps, and he will be far away with his people."

Meanwhile Abbas Khan was in consultation with the old Dervish, to whom he had told his mental trouble, and the appearance that tormented him. It would have been impossible for the old man to have ignored the affection, for he was himself a thorough believer in such appearances, and Zóra had drawn up for him many an amulet and charm against evil influences; but he thought also, with a physician's experience, that the illusion was more of the body than the mind, and resulted from the effects of the delirium, which it had been so difficult to relieve. He had charms and amulets of many kinds, and knew where they were all kept by Zóra; and he got up, went to a cupboard, and brought a paper divided into sixteen squares, in each of which there were Arabic figures.

"Wear this, in the name of Solomon, son of David," he said; "it will be good for thee; and let me press thy head while I say the prayer over thee, my son." And while Abbas Khan kneeled at his feet, the Dervish placed his hands on his temples and compressed his head as tightly as possible, muttering a prayer or exorcism in Arabic, of which the young man could only distinguish a few words, which appeared to be from the Koran. "If the vision trouble thee again, Abbas Khan," he resumed, "go, when

thou art at Beejapoor, to the Chishtee Peer Sahib; tell him what I have done to thee, and he will relieve thee more than I have power to do; and for thy body, let us consult the Padré Sahib. I have long heard of his skill as a physician."

"And is it lawful to take the medicine of a Feringi when I have my charm about me, O Dervish?" asked the Khan.

"Medicine is from Alla," he replied, "who directs its operation upon all. Feringis are men of the Book, and believe in the Lord Jesus and his mother Mary," said the old man, solemnly. "They have not our light, for that came later to the world; but their light is to be honoured, my friend. And this is a Padré, a holy man of whom all the country, Moslim and Hindoo, speak well. Yes, his medicine will be blessed to thee, and need not be feared. I will send for him presently, or, better still, I will ask him to see thee to-morrow, then thou wilt be calm and thy pulse even; now I find it is agitated more than usual. Meanwhile let the charm work."

"If I knew whom to thank," said the young man, earnestly, "I would revere thy name, for what do I not owe thee, for help when I was raving, and rescue from death? What can I do for thee, O holy man? If I, or my uncle Humeed Khan, could do aught, thou hast only to speak. Surely I and mine are grateful to thee, and to her who tended me alone."

"Ay, Zóra, sir; but she did only her duty, and has passed

away from thy mind. Who am I? and how art thou to call me? May I trust thee? The nephew of Humeed Khan should be as true as he is, and to no one yet hath my tale been told here, while at Beejapoor the old Syud is forgotten now. Yes, it matters not for me, but for Zóra much," he continued, after a pause, "very much. When I am gone, who shall defend her? She is an orphan, and alone."

"I promise to be secret and true," returned the young man, fervently, as he touched the feet of the Dervish; "treat me as a son, and before Alla I will be true."

Listen, then. Didst thou ever hear of Syud Ahmud Ali?"

"Yes, father," he replied, "I have. Men speak now of the holy Syud as a great physician, and use his prescriptions; but he is dead many, many years. Was he aught to thee?"

"I am Syud Ahmud Ali," replied the Dervish.

"Then why art thou here?" asked Abbas Khan, eagerly.

"Because I am forgotten," said the old man, with a deep sigh. "All my contemporaries are dead, or have passed away elsewhere; if any live they have forgotten me, and new men have sprung up who never heard of me. Listen! When I was a youth I went on the pilgrimage to Mecca with my father, who was a noble of the Court of Ibrahim Adil Shah, of honoured memory, and our family had been nobles of the court from the time of the great Yoosuf Adil Khan. My father died of the plague at Jedda, and, having ample

means, I desired to see the world. I had been studious also, and had no desire for a military life, and wished to be a physician. I went to Cairo, where I studied deeply, and learnt the Arabic tongue to perfection. I then visited Constantinople and Morocco, where there were Western Syuds of great learning. I even crossed into Spain, where some devout Mussulmans still remained. I married one of their daughters, a Houri in person, and I returned to Beejapoor with her, where the King Ibrahim Adil Shah received me with honour, gave me an estate—it was Almella, near the Bheeman—and all its dependencies; and I became known as the Syud of Almella. The King attached me to himself, and I served him, not only as a physician, but as a counsellor, and often in the field also, with all the fidelity and ability I possessed; and I grew in station, in rank, and in wealth.

"Perhaps I was too proud, perhaps neglected service to God which I ought to have done; but who can fathom the purposes of God, or question His decrees? for at the zenith of my fame and fortune I was overthrown so utterly that I have never risen again—and yet so unjustly.

"You have heard of the King's cruelties in his debaucheries during the latter days of his life; how he banished some of his physicians because they did not cure him, imprisoned others, and even had some put to death. What medicine could cure a man who, when he had obtained the least relief, disobeyed all directions

and became infuriated with wine? I had obtained leave to visit Almella for a few days to arrange the cultivation of my estate for the season, and the King gave it willingly. I left medicines for him, and instructions to the physicians who were to take my place, and I thought all was secure. But, alas! it was a false trust. No sooner had I reached my home than dreadful rumours began to arrive of how the King had become more and more furious; how he had caused several of the doctors to be trampled to death before him by elephants, and how he raved for me. Should I go or fly? I could have escaped easily into the dominions of the King of Golcondah, to Beeder, or to Ahmednugger; but I knew if I did that I should be followed by an army, and that the wars which had been happily ended would be renewed. But I had little time to think. The day after I had received the first message a large body of cavalry, with two of the eunuchs of the palace, came to fetch me. I was torn away from all I loved—my beautiful wife and my son—and hurried to Beejapoor.

"I expected no less than death; but when I arrived the King was calm, and his manner even affectionate. 'I have missed you much,' he said, 'and you are the only attendant in whom I can trust. They are weary of me, and want to poison me. Even now my son Ali is plotting with Kishwur Khan; Sikundur Khan and others are raising armies to dethrone me. I have no peace. I have constant tormenting pain and agony, which only you can

relieve. They told me you had fled, like many traitors, but I believed none of them, and sent an escort for you. O Syud Ahmud, forsake me not now! but bear with me, and relieve me;' and he bowed his head into my arms as I sat beside his bed. And I wept, for I was much affected; and the dread I had felt passed away.

"But not the danger. I had sent for my wife from Almella; riches poured in on me, for the King, in gratitude for the relief I was affording him, was lavish in his generosity. A large addition was made to my estate, and I received the Royal deeds for it. I was more than ever courted by the great and noble of the city; but still I felt that I might be dashed to the earth at any moment, yet I did not betray my feelings, though I often knew it was all I could do to restrain them, and the fatal hour overtook me at last. Who can resist the decrees of fate? Who can avert their final doom? As in life men are suddenly stricken with death, so I, at the zenith of my fame and fortune, was stricken down to this living death, which does not close.

"One morning, very early, I was summoned to the palace by a eunuch, who said the King was dying, had asked for me, and again relapsed into insensibility. I could not account for it, for when I left him he was cheerful and well. I only thought his time had come, and he must yield up his soul to God. When I arrived at the palace all was confusion and every one excited; and I heard loud wailings from the ladies' apartments; yet I went on, for my trust

in the King overmastered fear. 'Beware!' whispered a eunuch who stood at the entrance of the chamber; 'beware! he is furious; some one brought him strong wine last night, and he is mad. Beware!' But this did not stop me. I had often soothed him in his furious excitement, and I trusted to do so now. I heard him calling out my name, for the devils were tearing him to pieces, and I must send them away; and I entered the chamber, calling to him that I was present, and to fear not.

"He was lying on some cushions on the floor, almost naked, and as I approached him he rose up suddenly, and glaring at me with eyes that appeared starting from their sockets, cried, 'O traitor! who left me to the devils, thou shalt not escape me now; I will kill thee!' And the King was a powerful man, and I was never strong. He threw me down, and tried to strangle me, but I escaped and cried for help. Again and again he attacked me, but he was too much intoxicated to effect his purpose. At last he cried to the eunuchs who had clustered together at the curtain of the door, and were afraid to interfere, 'Away with him, put out his eyes, send him to Juldroog that his name may be forgotten;' and he sank back on his cushions exhausted. There was no delay; there, before him as I lay, one of the slaves, an Abyssinian armour-bearer, put out my eyes with his dagger, while others held me; and when it was done he said to the King, 'It is accomplished,' and I was led away.

"Not to my home, where I might have been soothed and tended in my agony, but to a cell, while preparations were made to send me away. Some pitying soul—who it was I never knew—gave me water and applied a dressing of cool herbs to my burning eyes; and at nightfall I was despatched hither. What had become of my wife and child I knew not. I remember nothing of the journey, except that I heard the sound of rushing waters, and was told I had reached Juldroog. My eyes healed gradually, but the beautiful world was gone for ever. After some months, when the King was dead, and the Prince Ali Adil Khan had succeeded, my wife and child were sent to me. She said all my wealth had been taken away, but she had secreted some gold, and brought it with her. I sent petitions to the new King, to the Ministers, to every friend I thought I had, for release and for justice; but the seeming friends had only been the companions of prosperity, and not one stretched out a friendly hand. I was told by the Governor then here, Azim Khan, a worthy kind man, that he had been told to forward no further petitions from me, and he exhorted me to bear the will of God with submission.

"I then determined to build a small house near the tomb of the holy Syud, which is yonder among the trees, and make myself its guardian. No objection was made, and I expended what my wife had brought upon it. I directed the observances at the tomb, and the sick came to me for help. In some years my wife and helpmate

died. My son Luteef, becoming impatient of a lonely life, went to Beejapoor, and being of a fine presence entered a body of Dekhan horse, where he soon rose. He once came to see me, after many years, and having married, left his wife with me, as she was pregnant, and could not return with him. Luteef told me that he had tried all he could to interest his commander in me, and to procure my release, but failed. I had been forgotten. Not long after we heard that my son had fallen in a great battle, and his wife, being taken in the pangs of labour, brought forth Zóra; and I was left with a helpless infant, who is now growing up, and is the prop of my remaining years, many or few, as Alla will. I have lived here forty years!"

"But surely," said the young man, earnestly, "justice is not dead in the kingdom; and though more than a reign is past, some of those old friends are living. Surely the noble Queen Chand would interfere in such a case as this, father; and she hath ever been like a mother to me since I was an orphan; and my uncle, too, Humeed Khan, who hath overcome Eyn-ool-Moolk, the traitor, who died in battle, and must be in favour. Ah! do not despair, for my heart tells me we shall yet meet in happiness."

"It is not for myself, for they give me all I need, and more," returned the old Syud, "but for the child that I would fain be free. Who is to tend her as she grows up? And if I died, who would shelter her? What would be her fate alone? Ah, thou

knowest well that such as she, poor and unfriended, are little respected. She is no longer a mere child, running wild and free among the people. No, as yet she hath gone everywhere unveiled and unfettered; but she hath learned no evil, no breath of evil thought hath touched her pure mind, but I cannot but feel that she is in danger. Wilt thou make one promise to me, Abbas Khan? Thy grandfather was a loved friend once, and Alla seems to have sent thee to me. If I should die, wilt thou rescue this poor child from want, if not from infamy?"

"I will, father, else I were false and ungrateful both to thee and to her. I would she were present that I might tell her so myself!"

"Nay! it were better not," returned the old man, gravely. "I will tell her as much as I need to do, and she will rely on thy truth and honour as I do. And now depart, for the evening is closing fast, and the road is not smooth. Rest peacefully to-night, and the Padré shall attend thee early to-morrow. For the rest, fear not; the talisman will keep thee from harm."

For many days there was no change in the daily life; the old Syud made his ministrations at the Saint's tomb; the priest laboured at his translation, and now and then visited his patient, in whom he had taken much interest. From him he had heard no ribaldry or banter, like that of the Nawab's, but was treated with respect and consideration; and Abbas Khan only awaited answers to letters from the capital, and the priest's permission

to proceed. With renewed health his illusions had ceased, and he longed for the bustle and stir of the capital, and the chances of employment in the field. An event, too, which seemed unavoidable, was to happen—his own marriage to one to whom he had been betrothed in childhood; a thought which he detested, but of this more hereafter.

It will not be doubted that Maria and Zóra had become fast friends. Maria did not feel the time pass wearily. She had copies to make of her brother's daily work; she continued her embroidery and her lace-work, in which she was particularly skilful, and she taught it to Zóra, as she in turn admired the girl's own industry and its effects. The illumination of her manuscripts was also a delightful occupation, at which Zóra used to marvel greatly; but it was Maria's music that was her greatest attraction. The chanting of their morning and evening services was listened to even by the old Syud with delight, and by Zóra with positive rapture. Often, too, would Maria sing the sweet ballads of her country, and play on her guitar, and was surprised at Zóra's quick ear, and the readiness with which she learned to play simple airs and accompaniments. So it was again a peaceful time to all; and letters came from Moodgul bidding the Padré to be patient, and they were generally accompanied by baskets of ripe mangoes and sweetmeats from the Nawab's children. The old deacon, too, and some of his people had come also, and told how Dom Diego had

become morose and sullen; how he often neglected the services of the church; and, it was reported by his servant, drank too much strong wine at night. How the garden was flourishing, and, indeed, the mangoes he brought were delicious.

Thus a month had passed at Juldroog; the floods had come and gone, and come again; and so departed: but Maria never endeavoured to reach the gun bastion, or to enter the precincts of the fort. She had no desire to encounter the claws of a panther again, and, above all, she feared the licentious look of the Governor, whom she might meet at any time. Even Zóra failed to persuade her to revisit the place she had seen, and ceased to urge it. At home they had ample employment: the flowers were tended in the little garden, the vine and the fig-tree were pruned by the priest after the Portuguese manner, and for a morning or evening stroll they had the lower end of the island, where the grass was now green, and filled with pretty wild flowers, and the lovely wild oleanders were in full bloom.

Neither of the young men came down from their airy pinnacle except once, when they went to hunt on the left bank of the river, and to meet Runga Naik, whom Abbas Khan desired to see; for when he returned to Beejapoor, whom could he trust to send him intelligence of the Syud's death if it occurred? who could protect Zóra? But Runga Naik, who resided within a few miles, whose men served in the fort, would be sure to know

everything. Taking him aside, then, as all were resting for a while, Abbas Khan easily obtained his promised co-operation.

Runga had known the old Syud from his youth upwards, and had a superstitious regard for him. They had always been good friends, and for Zóra's care of his young chief during that memorable night, he had felt gratitude and love. Yes, he would watch over them and protect them; Zóra should never come to harm; and if her grandfather died suddenly he would bring Zóra away, and his wife should receive her, and she should be sent to Beejapoor whenever he got an order to do so. Meeah need not fear, the fort should be watched, and every night the Syud's home should be guarded. Perhaps the Beydur chief had no good opinion of the Nawab's morality, and feared for the fate of Zóra if she should be unprotected, and in fact in any case.

And the inevitable day of separation came at last. A letter from the Nawab of Moodgul came to Francis d'Almeida, and with it other despatches to Osman Beg and the young Khan.

"The Queen desires to see you," wrote the Nawab to Francis, "and commands you to come in all confidence to her feet. There are many events pending between the Government of Portugal and that of the Adil Shahies, in which your presence will be of great service to both, and Her Majesty wants your confidence. A suitable escort will be sent for you, and you will be under the charge of Abbas Khan, who is directed to accompany you. In

three or four days you may expect the escort, and you will have time to make your preparations. I am sorry to lose you," he continued, in his own rough writing, "but before the orders of the Queen regrets are unavailing. I have only to trust that you may return to your friends here and your people, who grieve at your absence; but they hope, as your friend does, that you may return in peace to dwell among us. The Khanum Sahiba salutes your sister, and prays for her."

The priest took the letter to the palace, where he found his patient in the highest spirits and good humour. The prospect to him of an honourable return to Beejapoor, and the few lines addressed to him by the Queen Dowager in her own hand, had charmed him. His uncle had not returned, but was soon expected; and the sincere regard he had contracted for the priest made the prospect of his company the more acceptable. "My cousin," he said, "has received his own orders to send you on, but he does not relish the idea of future solitude, and is vexed about it. As for myself, the prospect of escape from here is too joyful almost to realise, and my only regret remains with your host, to whom, under Alla, I owe my life; yet I think I may be able to serve him, and poor little Zóra also, sooner than they think. Tell the old man I will come to take leave of him before we depart."

As to Zóra, her misery was more than can be told. In one short month a new life had opened to her under Maria's influence

which was now to cease. Who would teach her? who would sing to her? who would give her holy counsel? The communion with Maria's sweet pure spirit had raised the girl's ductile mind from many imperfections, which were the result of neglect and uncontrol, and till the day of parting she was inconsolable; but to Maria's surprise and gratification the girl rallied.

"I can let you go," she said, simply, "for I know we shall meet again. You will send for me if you go to Moodgul, will you not? And if Abba dies I will come to you. I have no trust but in you and in God, and Abba tells me that will never fail."

When Abbas Khan came to take his leave of her grandfather, she could not help hearing what he said of thanks and gratitude to him and to herself, and his renewed promise of care and protection. She heard his sob as he embraced her grandfather, and for a moment saw his face as he turned to go away. It was a new joy and comfort to her to know that she had not been forgotten, and might look to him in any trouble.

We will not follow the little events which made up the departure, and farewells between persons who had been so strangely cast together are too often painful. Zóra did not go to the river side with Maria; she sat on the terrace of the house, whence she could see her, and pressed the little cross that Maria had given her to her heart. It seemed to her a talisman of safety. All the little gifts Maria had given her—some drawings and other trifles—

she had put away carefully. They were her only treasures. As she looked, with her eyes blinded by tears, she saw the elephants and horses on the farther bank, and palanquins and bearers, and camels for the baggage. Then Maria and her brother and the two old servants entered one basket boat, and the Khan another with his attendants; Runga Naik and his men directing everything.

As they were leaving the shore, all waved to her a last farewell: the rowers took their places, and the boats shot down the swift current with speed, edging, however, gradually to the land opposite. Then all landed, and Abbas Khan, after caressing him, mounted a fiery horse, which bounded and caracoled under him. The Padré and Maria seated themselves in palanquins, and the whole procession moved on. Zóra watched it ascend the bank, and her eyes followed it, while the jangling bells of the elephants came fitfully on the wind among the brushwood and trees, till she could see it no longer. Then she left her seat, and betaking herself to her grandfather, fell on his neck, weeping passionately.

CHAPTER VIII.

MÁMA LUTEEFA PROPHESIES.

In the lonely fortress its late visitors were sorely missed by all those with whom they had resided for nearly two months, and by none more impatiently than by Osman Beg, its governor. By nature cruel, self-indulgent, and profligate, he was a man of all others most unlikely to endure a lonely life with ordinary firmness, or accommodate himself to banishment, or at least seclusion, of which he could see no means of enlivenment or termination. He had no companions, for he had no sympathy with the Hindoo zemindars who were his neighbours, for the most part rude and uncultivated men, who despised his affectation of superiority, and did not disguise their opinion of his uncourteous, and often insulting, language. They seldom visited him, indeed, except to pay the usual rents of the dependencies of the fort, which they held from the State. The Moolla of the mosque and his own physician were intense bigots, whose conversation was limited to the subject of the Koran and its various commentaries, of which they were diligent students; and from the Moolla the Nawab had to endure many rebukes as to laxity in observances of the faith, or license

of speech and conduct, and the meetings of the men often resulted in bitter altercations, which only made matters worse.

The Moolla had no respect for a Governor who had neither wife nor family. His predecessor was a respectable elderly soldier, a plain man, who cordially mixed with all classes, and was much beloved. He had a lady wife, who bore children, and the palace was often the scene of small domestic festivals, of general religious observances, in which the Moolla acted as chief manager, and received ample rewards for his services. His wife, too, was always welcome after her long trudge up the hill, and was hospitably entertained, contributing, on her part, all the gossip of the country round.

It was very different now. The Nawab had no wife, and no hareem of any kind. There were no entertainments, for the dancing women of the country were afraid of the Nawab's grim solitude, and declined even to cross the river while the water was high, with the chance of being cut off by a flood at any time and confined for an indefinite period.

The "Nawab," too, had other troubles which were even harder to bear. Soon after his cousin left, he had ridden over to Moodgul, and in company with some of his old associates, who belonged to the force stationed there, had indulged in excesses with a zest augmented by long abstinence, so that he became more notorious than was good for his reputation. The consequence

of this being that his brother Nawab, the old friend of the Christian friar and his sister, a moral and devout man, treated him coldly, restricting his hospitalities to such ordinary observances as could not be dispensed with, considering the relative position of both.

Not in any way abashed by this, Osman Beg determined, if possible, to gain the beautiful daughter of the Moodgul commander and governor in marriage, and to this end he employed one of the professional female agents, who are well known among Mussulman communities, to make advances for him.

Máma Luteefa was a mistress of her art. She carried gold and silver ornaments, entrusted to her by the goldsmiths, from house to house; rich cloths also—portions of Portuguese velvets and silks; and while selling these had ample opportunity of carrying on her vocation. In the course of a few days she had contrived to make a proposal for her employer in a manner suited to his rank and her own importance. But it was rejected peremptorily; and when the old dame returned a few days afterwards with some valuable offerings, she found herself warned never to enter the precincts of the hareem again on a similar errand. Osman Beg also received an intimation that his presence in Moodgul was not desirable, and he had better withdraw. He therefore returned to his solitary life, but he took Máma Luteefa with him, in case, as she observed, there might be anyone in the fort, or near it, who

could be considered a fitting person for the distinction which would be the lot of Osman Beg's wife.

We may consider, then, that the Nawab's cup of vexation was full, as far as his present position in the fort was concerned; and without it was equally gloomy. The issue on which he had set his heart was the victory of Eyn-ool-Moolk and the young Prince. He had already offered his sword and the fortress, which, as a frontier position, was very valuable. He should at once rise to rank and favour, and whether a new Court was established at Belgaum, or the present Court at Beejapoor became head of the Beejapoor kingdom, he should in either case fill a prominent position.

Nothing had, however, happened, except to increase his vexation and cut away the last chances of extrication. The Prince Ismail, we know, rejected by the Portuguese, had been apprehended and put to death. Eyn-ool-Moolk had been slain and beheaded, to which his grim head, stuck on a high pole opposite the gate of the citadel at Beejapoor, bore ghastly witness, and that fondly cherished hope was gone; whereas his numerous letters, which, in their offers of aid and counsel for the extension of the rebellion, contained the most conclusive evidence of his treachery, might have been preserved among the papers of Eyn-ool-Moolk, and would furnish incontestable proofs to his enemies, and lead directly to his condemnation. Once only

he had received a few lines from his cousin to say that he had fallen ill on his way and was detained, but when anything affecting him could be heard of, he would write again; but nothing more had arrived. Yet, could he be recalled at any sacrifice, how easy would it be, if he escaped death, to carve out a path of his own, if not at Beejapoor, at Golcondah, at Ahmednugger, or with the Moghuls, who were steadily encroaching upon the kingdoms of the Dekhan. No, Osman Beg was not happy; he was, on the contrary, more discontented than ever, and his very body servants lived in terror of his outbreaks of ill-temper and violence.

The venerable Syud-Dervish had also grieved at the departure of his guests. Francis d'Almeida's knowledge of Persian brought him into intimate acquaintance with the old man, whose remembrance of Spanish, which he had learned from his wife, assisted their means of communication very sensibly. The Dervish missed the pleasant arguments and discussions on religion and other subjects, the descriptions of European life, the histories of the countries he had once visited with so much enjoyment. He had grown interested in the good Padré's translations, and, a man of the world himself, could rise out of the humble place he occupied to the enjoyment of better things. He had now nothing to fall back upon, no cheery word from the Padré or gentle compassion from his sister. There was no one to sing to him either in early

morning or the evening worship; and though both were sinful according to the strict rules of the Mussulman faith, yet they were fascinating all the same. The old man's days passed listlessly now, in prayer or meditation, and in prescribing for the sick brought to him; but, for the most part, in a state of vacancy from which it was difficult to arouse him.

But to Zóra the parting with Maria was more than a regret, it had become a grief for which there was no relief or consolation. It was Maria who had quickened the girl's dormant spirit, which before lay dead under an outer covering of ignorance and neglect, and might never have been moved but for the Señora's gentle teachings.

The natural intelligence of the child would have died out under the ordinary life of a Mussulman woman of the lower orders, a station which she at best could hope to fill. The intercourse with Maria, short as it had been, had opened to Zóra an apparently unbounded vista of the world without, and of knowledge which she burned to attain. Now that hope seemed dead within her; she could only revert to her former condition of life, to the care of her grandfather, to her Persian books, and the habitual services to the sick, in which she had made no alteration, and in which now lay her principal interest. Day after day the little memorials of her sisterly friend's visit were taken out, looked at, kissed, and put back again. Day after day she sang the little

hymns and songs she had learned. She talked to her sick doll of the kind Christian lady, of her gentle, soothing presence, and her wise words; and here she found sympathy, such as gave her comfort.

But when could she hope to see Maria again? Perhaps when she returned to Moodgul; but the wicked Padré was yet there. Perhaps—ah! who shall tell the seeming possibilities presented by hope to a young, ardent mind, which yearns for fulfilment? Sometimes, once or twice only, she had persuaded her friend Ahmed to take her to their old seat on the gun bastion, whence she could follow every event of the day on which she had taken Maria there—the sudden flood, the dead panther, and the presence of one who to her was a new and trembling joy. "Forget him!" "do not think of him!" had been her friend's injunctions; but she only shook her head and sighed, and the unceasing moan of the river plashing at her feet seemed but an echo to her sad thoughts, which, as yet, in her young heart, had no definite meaning. Memories only of that terrible night, and of his manly, gracious bearing and kind looks, which had no expression in words—these would not depart, and yet she knew them to be fruitless. Had she possessed a mother, or even a friend, she could have spoken freely of those absent; but she was alone, quite alone, and the future to her was very dark.

Máma Luteefa had been at Juldroog some days. The Nawab

had had one of the rooms in the zenana of the palace prepared to receive her, and made her as comfortable as he could; but the old dame was in no good humour, indeed, was in the last degree of indignation and vexation. Máma Luteefa was about fifty years of age, with delicate features; her hair was grey, and became her neatly braided as it was; and she wore a green satin petticoat, a scarf of the finest muslin being fastened into her waist and cast over her head. Her small feet were bare, and round her ankles were a pair of costly gold anklets, with some heavy rings on her toes. On her left arm she wore an armlet of solid gold, a late present from her employer the Nawab, and a plain necklace of sequins about her neck. Thus attired, Máma Luteefa presented a good specimen of a high class confidential female servant in a Mussulman family, and was quite aware of this herself.

"To take me away from my own house, and all I had to do," she said, "to deprive me of all my society and the sweet confidences of damsels eager to know all about the husbands I propose to them—what sort of noses they have, and lips, and eyes; whether they are merry or sad, stout or lean, rich or poor. And of course, Shireen-bee," she continued to a somewhat elderly dame who was her servant and companion, "I only tell them that the men are all they ask me, though they may be lame or blind, ugly or old, or poor as Fakeers. What is all that to me? If they marry, they only fulfil their destiny; and water may be married to

fire, or air to air, according to the law of temperaments, for all that I care. It is the astrologer's business to do that, not mine; and if he blunders, what care I, so long as my fee is paid! But ah! 'tis a pleasant life."

"But you are so wise, mother," said the woman, "and so honoured, and everyone is so glad when you come to see them, and give you the best pán and sugar candy, and I have to carry home sweetmeats by the basket-load. And was I not proud to see you in your palanquin, smoking a whiff now and then from your bright silver hookah, and eating your pán; and to see all the people in the bazaars making humble salaams to you as you passed by, and to hear the cries, 'God speed you, mother, to a happy marriage; we wish you luck in your business. Ah! Máma Luteefa is one of the old true sort, may her prosperity increase.' Did I not feel proud then as I walked by the side of your palkee and handed the choicest leaves of pán to you, neatly rolled up and fastened with a clove. Ah! that was honour and reputation to me; and how anxiously I looked to the issue of every case you took up."

"And did I ever fail, Shireen-bee?" she asked, with an air of confidence. "Never, by the saints, never! When this unsainted Nawab told me to propose him to the mother of that fairy-faced Nujm-ool-Nissa, I told him he wouldn't be accepted; and when he employed a low wretch, the very mention of whose name ensured his refusal, he got his answer—a rough one if I know right. It is only a respect-

able woman like me, I tell you, who can manage these delicate affairs in great families;" and the old dame took a pinch of snuff with an expressive snort.

"And what induced you to come to this rude place, Mother Luteefa?" asked Shireen-bee. "Don't you remember all I told you about it, that it was only a place for State prisoners who have to be beheaded? Whom dost thou expect to get for *him* here, unless it be a ghost or a ghoul?"

"Yes," replied her mistress, with a deep sigh, "it is truly an unsainted place altogether; bare rocks, a roaring river which fills one's head, makes one dizzy, and even cotton cannot keep it out. One cannot stir out for fear of falling into the holes between the rocks and being eaten by panthers or bears. Yes, if it had not been for the bag of five hundred rupees he brought me, and this gold ring for my arm, I had never come—never come," cried the dame, whimpering; "and now I am here, what can I do? Hast thou heard of anybody?"

"I swear by your neck, mother, I have seen no one, and I have looked all over the village. The Moolla has a daughter, who is seven years old and squints; she would not do; and besides, she is betrothed. There are two weavers who have daughters; one is sixteen, but she is deformed and is seamed by small-pox; the other two are mere children. There is a Brahmin's daughter who could be brought up here, and the belief and Fateha said

over her, but I suppose the Nawab Sahib would be afraid to do that."

"May the kind Alla help me!" cried Dame Luteefa, wringing her hands, "is that all? O Shireen-bee, any one with a petticoat, so that we escape! Even if he got vexed and turned us out of the fort I should be thankful, and I vow Fatehas to Sofy Surmust and all the saints if they will grant us a safe deliverance. But is there no one—no one across the river—no one anywhere? Do not say there is no one."

"Not a soul, mother," said Shireen, letting her hands drop on her lap. "They are all Hindoos and Beydurs; there is not a true believer within miles. Yet, stay; there is the old Syud's daughter, she might answer. Some say she is as beautiful as a fairy; others that she is a tall, lanky girl, with big eyes, kind to the poor, and learned, and all love her."

"She a Syud, and he a Mogul—a bad conjunction; and her name is——?"

"Zóra."

"Zoé and Alif, water and fire. The one puts out the other. They won't mix. No, that won't do, Shireen-bee."

"You are thinking of a real marriage, when both houses are good and wealthy, not Fakeers, as these are," returned Shireen, rather tartly, as she rolled some tobacco in the palm of her hand, with an extra quantity of lime to make it sharp. "If this won't

answer, what are we to do? How are we to get out of this den? But what does it matter? If it won't do, it won't; that's all your slave has to say;" and she turned herself away rather doggedly. The prospect of a prolonged residence in Juldroog was anything but agreeable to her. There was no gossip, no bazaar to go to; and even the pán was old and green, only fit for goats to eat.

Luteefa-bee reflected. "Would the old Syud give his granddaughter? Could there be a marriage of any kind in such a place? Suppose the girl would not hear of it. And, last of all, dare she propose even a 'Nika,' to so great a man as the Nawab, with only a Fakeer's daughter, or whatever she might be? If she were indiscreet she might loose her reputation altogether; and she only, to her credit, dealt with honourable marriages."

"I might try him," she said to her servant, hesitatingly, "and see what he says. At the worst he might get angry, and send us away. But, then, the money! I should have to give up what he has given me; and it is much, too much, not to risk a chance for."

"Of course it is, mother," said Shireen. "You would be a fool to give up five hundred rupees. Why, it is riches, mother, riches! Do not sit there thinking; people who sit thinking never do anything. Get up, and go directly, and you had better go alone."

"Well, if it must be, it must be; what is to happen is to

happen, and no one can help their fate," she said, with a great sigh, as she got up from her seat. "Fire and water, fire and water, they won't mingle."

"Go, I tell you," cried Shireen-bee; "you are thinking again, and if you want to do that, you had better not go at all. Are you a coward?"

Luteefa-bee went away sadly, wiping her eyes, and, asking to see Osman Beg, was ushered into his presence by an Abyssinian slave.

He was alone, smoking, and idly looking up the glen from one of the arched doorways, where a pleasant breeze entered and cooled the room.

"What news, mother?" he said; "what hast thou been doing, and when am I to have a wife?"

He spoke good humouredly, but she did not like the expression of his eyes. They looked to her perception as if he would have added, "if you do not get me one soon, I will have you flung down the rocks into the river." And she shuddered at the bare thought.

"Ah! it is cold here," continued Osman Beg, who observed the action; "come, and sit out of the wind, and tell me what news thou hast."

"Protector of the poor," cried the woman, "forgive your slave, but she has no news. Shireen has been everywhere, but there is

no one worthy of you, no one to whom Luteefa-bee could unite you. Had there even been one, however lowly in birth, your slave would have gone herself and arranged everything. But one is lame, another deformed, two are little children; and as to anyone of decent station, we cannot hear of anybody in the whole country, even at Sugger. All the Mussulmans are only poor weavers. Therefore, your slave begs permission to depart. She is full of grief; but, who can control destiny?"

"You are a cheat!" cried the Nawab, furiously. "A cheat, like all your people. Where are the rupees I gave you? Give them back; and may the Shytàn burn you. I say, where is the money?"

"I left it at Moodgul, with the banker," returned the woman, whimpering. "Send some one with me, and I will give it back. But the Nawab Osman Beg's generosity is great," she added, soothingly; "and what is given is given. Who ever asks return of a gift?"

"That is a lie, mother," he said, grimly. "I know that money is in thy waistband in gold pieces, and, by the saints, I have a mind to have thee stripped by the eunuchs, and I would fling it into the river, and thy carcase after it. Dost thou hear, liar and cheat? Thou hadst as well trifle with the devil as with me. Beware!"

"Ah, my lord, do not be angry with your poor slave!" cried the

dame, casting herself before him, and pressing her forehead against the foot that was extended. "Forgive me! I have no refuge but you in this wild place. Do not be angry with me, else I shall die. There is yet one thing I would say, if I were permitted, only I was afraid you would be angry."

"Well, get up then, and say it," he returned, sulkily; "but, by Alla, if thou try to cheat me again, I will do as I said. May the blessed Koran be my witness;" and he took up the book and touched his breast and forehead with it.

The woman trembled. She believed Osman Beg to be perfectly capable of doing any violence to her, and he, and his Abyssinian slaves, bore an evil reputation in the little village. The only gossip that Shireen could pick up in the bazaar was that several respectable farmers had sent away their wives and children to villages beyond the river. She must speak now, however, or run the chance of death.

"My lord, my lord, mercy!" she cried, putting up her joined hands. "The Fakeer's daughter, his child. My lord, forgive me for mentioning one so mean, so far beneath my lord's station."

"Ha! so she is to be my fate after all," he said to himself; then added, "Is it to be so, dame? Hast thou seen her? She is beautiful!"

"No," she answered, "I have not, but Shireen has; and says she will be beautiful when she grows up; but she is too young at present to judge."

"I have seen her," returned Osman Beg; "she will, indeed, be beautiful;" and he sat silent for some minutes.

"But, my lord," returned the dame, after the silence had grown too long to be safe, "according to my science, which was taught me by the blessed Saint Geesoo Daraz, of Gulburgah, the union would not be propitious, and I warn thee of danger. Thou art water and she is fire, and would consume thee; so let it pass, I say there is danger to thee."

"Peace with thy jargon, O fool! Am I not burned already by her? Doth she not consume me night and day? By Alla, I believe she is a witch, and the old man a sorcerer, and they have been plotting their hellish magic against me. What care I for thy jargon?"

"Well, if my lord doth not fear it," she returned, "it can go on. Else — never mind, I did only my honest duty in telling and warning thee. Shall I go down to the Syud, and make my proposal for my lord? I can offer money, rank, dignity, jewels, and my lord's heart, which is already devoured by the flame of love. What girl could refuse all these, much less a Fakeer's child? May I go?"

"No," said Osman Beg, savagely; "if she is my fate, I will manage it my own way. Begone! when I need thee I will send for thee."

"What made the unblest woman name her?" he thought aloud

"Zóra! her fate is not mine according to the dame's vile jargon; and yet she is my fate, as I have known long, oh, so long. Zóra, so beautiful as thou art, how often have I watched thee, bounding among the rocks like a deer, going demurely through the village to the sick folk, and hearing blessings showered on thee by every tongue! Yet she avoids me, and shudders when she meets me. Dare I ask her of her grandfather? Useless, the Syud was insolent before, and told me the holy brotherhood could not mate with the sons of Turcoman robbers. No, she is my fate, were there a thousand dangers; and I dare it, for I cannot avert what is written. Ho, Johur! art thou without?"

The huge Abyssinian drew aside the curtain and entered, clasping his hands upon his broad chest, and stood like a bronze statue before him. "Johur," said his master, after a pause.

"I am here," was the reply.

"Johur," continued Osman Beg, after a while, "thou knowest the girl Zóra?"

"I know her—the Syud's grandchild; every one knows her."

"Does she ever come about the fort as she used to do, gathering flowers or leaves for her goats?"

"Of course she does, master; no one hinders her; we often speak to her, and she has ever a merry word for me. I pull flowers for her when she cannot reach them."

"You must bring her to me, Johur; I have much to say to her."

Johur started; he feared evil to the girl, but he dared not disobey. He well knew that his life would be the instant forfeit, and the rocks his grave, where a fellow slave had gone before him.

"She will not come readily with me," said the slave, as the tears ran down his cheeks, and his chest heaved.

"That is for thee to manage. Take Abdulla and Raheem with thee if thou wilt. Else thou knowest what will follow, and that disobedience is death. Go, be wise, and bring her."

"When? master."

"It is late to-day, the evening closes; to-morrow, if you see her, is enough; watch and see."

"I obey," said the man; "your orders are on my head and eyes;" and he withdrew. "But, oh! Zóra! Zóra!" he cried with a bitter cry as he went out, "that it should be I to have to do this deed. I would that I were dead."

CHAPTER IX.

TREACHERY.

THE next day Zóra was sitting in her little court alone, thinking of Maria, and every now and then the tears welled up in her eyes. She was sad, she knew not why, for all around her was bright and beautiful.

"She is thinking of me," she said, "and her thoughts are sad to-day, as mine are. Why doth sadness gather about me, while all are so happy? Coo! coo!" she cried; and her beautiful pigeons, rising from the roof of the little mosque, fluttered down into the court and clustered around her feet. "Say, what message shall I send her who loved you, and fed you every day? Yes, I will tell her you love her still; and I will send her one of your beautiful feathers, Zumrood!" she said to one of the birds; "you know she loved you more than any. Come hither, pretty one!" and she stooped and picked it up. "Now kiss me as you used to kiss her, you faithless bird; and let me take one of your glossy feathers for her whom we have lost. Ah! thou shouldst not peck me, darling; it will not hurt thee. And if it does, what matter? Thou

shouldst not grudge pain for one that loved thee. Behold, I suffer pain always now—always, always! and there is no relief for it. Now go;" and she cast the bird fluttering into the air. "Go, thou at least art free. Yes," she continued, smoothing down the feather glowing with bright emerald hues, "this will remind her of her pet, and she will put it to her beautiful white throat as she used to put Zumrood's soft breast, and think of me. Yes, her thoughts will come back to us; and though she is far away among great folks, when she shuts her eyes she can see us all as I see her—me, and the birds and the flowers, and the trees, and even the sick children who loved her so. And now I will write. Ahmed will be here soon, and the letter must be ready;" and, bringing out her writing materials, she sat down in the shade of the fig tree and vine, and began her simple letter, which ran thus:—

"To my sister, beloved in the Lord Jesus and His mother Mary. Greeting, from my heart; and the blessing of Alla, the Most High, and peace be with you.

"I am not used to writing, and my composition and spelling will be very bad. You must forgive them. But I must write, for my heart is full and sad because I have no news of you, which fills my mind with grief. I used not to be sad; but now you are gone I seem not to be here, but far away with you. And yet I am here, and am sitting under the fig tree, and all the pigeons are cooing about me; and I have just taken a feather from Zumrood's

breast, where you used to lay it against your white throat and teach it to kiss you. They all remember you, and we all want you so much to be with us; but we cannot go to you, nor can you come to us, at which our hearts are full of grief, and my tears will fall as I write. Abba is well, but he is sad too. 'When will the Padré Sahib return to Moodgul?' he asks very often; but how can I tell him? So we are lonely, and I often lie down and weep; but that is no use, and you will say, 'Oh! foolish child to weep.' I have gone twice to the bastion with Ahmed, and sat there, and remembered all that happened. I would be there every day if I could, but they are beginning to tell me I am too old to go out by myself, and what will all the sick children do if I do not visit them? If you were here, I could go with you; but I look round and see you not. Remember I have no one in all the world but you, Maria; and when Abba dies, according to God's will, I will put on the green dress of my order and beg my way to your feet. It is sad to be alone, my sister, very sad, and more than I can bear sometimes, and I suffered to-day; but you will read these broken sentences of mine and pity me, for I am so lonely. Abba salutes you and your brother, and even old Hoosein-bee. All the village people salute you and pray for you. I hear that Abbas Khan is well, and am thankful. What more is there to write? Behold, I have written you so long a letter that you may be angry; but my love for you urged me on, and I thought you would like to have one of Zumrood's feathers. Do not forget me."

Then Zóra made up the letter carefully, and enclosed the bright feather, and wrote the address. It was to go by a special messenger whom Abbas Khan had sent with a letter to his cousin, who was to depart in the afternoon, and who would reach Beejapoor in two or three days. He had promised to deliver it to Maria herself, and as Ahmed had now called to her from without, she took her letter and gave it to him with many injunctions to be impressed upón the messenger about its delivery, and a rupee, which she had asked of her grandfather for the purpose. "And, oh, Ahmed!" she said, "return soon and take me to the bastion in the afternoon. I have been writing to the Lady Maria, and my heart is sad; and I would go and sit there a while, for I am always better when I do so. Wilt thou come, or shall I go alone?"

"Not alone," he replied; "not alone. Have you forgotten the panther? and you are getting too old, Zóra-bee, to go out by yourself. You should have a proper veiled garment on, for you grow too beautiful for the rough soldiers to look on. I must speak to Abba about this."

"Oh! no, no!" cried the girl, "who would harm a Syudanee? I shall never wear a veil. When I put on the green dress I shall not be veiled, Ahmed."

"May the Lord forbid thou shouldst ever wear it, my fairy," said the man, fervently. "Surely a better fate is thine than a Fakeer's life! Touba! Touba! why didst thou say that, lady?"

"I am not lady, Ahmed," she said, petulantly; "I am only Zóra, the Fakeer; and thou wilt see me go forth in the name of God and the Prophet some day. No one will harm me, Ahmed, and I fear no one."

"Thou hast a brave heart, Zóra," he returned; "but I pray Alla I may never see the day when thou hast to face the world alone. Ah, do not weep, child. I will take thee to the bastion presently, when I have got my gun; do not attempt to go alone. And this is to be the last time, remember," he continued, shaking his finger at her as he strode away—"the last time, I swear by your feet!"

"Ah, he always says that, poor fellow!" said the girl to herself, "and yet he comes with me all the same. Now let me get my sheet and cover myself. No one shall see me, if he does not like my face to be uncovered. Abba," she continued to her grandfather, who sat thinking in the doorway, telling his beads, "I am going out for awhile with Ahmed, but I will not delay. I have not been out all the day."

"Go, Zóra," he said quietly. "May Alla keep thee! But do not delay long. My heart trembles for thee sometimes when thou art long absent; but Ahmed will be with thee, and I do not fear."

Ahmed soon returned with his matchlock over his shoulder, and its match lighted; and they set out together, and were soon at the spot so dear to the girl. Ahmed saw that she was sad, and

thought she would be better alone, and, telling her so, sat down on the lowest step of those which led up to the bastion, and bidding her be careful as she passed him and went on to her old place. It was a beautiful afternoon. The fleecy clouds were no longer in motion, but were settling down into the west in thin, straight lines. The waters of the river were much diminished, but streams, touched by the sun's light, were sparkling as they descended the rocks of the cataract, and the river bed was full of gentle murmur as the water plashed among the low rocks and shallows of its course. Even the precipices and the foliage glowed with rich colours, and a sense of beauty was more predominant than the terror the scene often inspired. I think we can partly guess the girl's thoughts.

"It would have been better I had never seen them," she said to herself, "or known them as I do, for now I yearn for Maria; and though she told me not to think of him," and a blush spread over her fair face as she drew her covering over her face involuntarily. "But it is as if he were there, when he stood that day and looked kindly on me; and how can I forget him? I cannot forget that night. I may be old, I may wander among the people as one devoted to God, and the world may be hard to me, but I shall not forget."

Hers was an untutored mind, with no experience, filled only by two seemingly painful objects—her friends, for so they had seemed to her, whom she should never meet again; and the life she

might have to live were she alone. What refuge, or chance of refuge, had she to look to when her grandfather passed away? And it was clear to her that he grew weaker month after month. The decay was gradual, but it was impending; and when the end came, her battle of life would begin. It was a gloomy prospect, filled with terror, and the girl's tears fell fast and often as she sat alone, while the great river seemed to moan and sob in sympathy. How long she would have sat there it is impossible to say; the place and its recollections were too precious to her to desert; the evening was so calm and balmy, the clouds in the west were becoming golden, and the ravine and the cataract were veiled with a thin, glowing vapour, mingled with spray.

Suddenly a powerful voice from a place high in the rocks above her called out, "Ahmed! Ahmed! Where art thou?" Zóra knew the voice: it was Johur's, the Nawab's Abyssinian slave, who had often helped her to climb rocks, and gather flowers of the beautiful creepers which hung over them. "Ahmed! Ahmed!"

"I am here," shouted Ahmed, who had ascended the bastion to see who called him. "What do you want with me?"

"The master wants thee; come up: he is angry that thou art not present. Take care, he is in no humour to wait."

"I will take Zóra home," he replied, "and come to you by the main road."

"That will not do," cried the slave; "come up directly. If I go and say I have seen thee then, and thou wouldst not come, what would happen? Ah, thou knowest too well! Come, I will protect the lady."

"I must go, Zóra," said Ahmed, "or I shall be flogged. Johur will see thee home. Thou art not afraid of him?"

"No," she said, "I do not fear Johur, he is always good to me." And as she spoke, Ahmed laid his gun over his shoulder, and ran up the narrow pathway to the palace. Meeting Johur, who was descending, he asked, "What does he want with me, Johur?"

"As if I knew," was the reply. "It is some message to be taken somewhere. Go and see for thyself, and be quick," and Ahmed hurried on; while Johur, calling to Zóra, bid her wait, for he was coming to her as fast as he could. He had two other slaves with him, but she did not fear them. She had risen as he approached her, with a humble reverence, but sate down again. Her thoughts were now blurred and indefinite; her thread of meditation and enjoyment had been broken, and she seemed unable to renew it in any form. The negro had seated himself a little distance from her, on a stone, and appeared to look at her with sad eyes; and gradually a gloom as of apprehension began to steal over her. She was about to rise, and was drawing her sheet about her, when she heard a low sob from the man, and saw tears trickle down his face.

"What is the matter, Johur?" she asked kindly, as she advanced a step towards him; "has the Nawab punished thee? Is he angry with thee?"

"It is for thee I weep, lady," he said. "I have to take thee to him; but I wish I were dead."

"Me!" exclaimed Zóra, shivering with fear; "me! to him! Oh, thou wouldst not do this evil, Johur? Hast thou not carried me over rocks, gathered flowers for me, sat here with me, and treated me like thine own child, Johur? Dost thou remember? Oh, it is not true! Tell me it is not true, and I will kiss thy feet. Take me to Abba, and he will reward thee; but do not this cruel evil in the sight of God to a Fakeer's child."

"If I speak to thee I shall fail," the man answered between his closed teeth. "If I do not take thee I shall be beheaded; my life is in thy hands, lady. Come quietly with me, I will not hurt thee."

"To him?" shrieked Zóra; "to him, the merciless? O Alla, take me!" she cried, with an exceeding bitter cry of despair, as she rushed to the low parapet of the bastion, with intent to throw herself over; but Johur caught her in his arms in time to prevent her.

"Are you mad?" he cried; "nay, if thou art, I cannot help thee. Only forgive me, Zóra-bee, for I must do this deed or die! Do not struggle so, child, you will but hurt yourself, and I shall be

blamed. Ho! Abdulla, come up, quick! There, swathe her sheet round her, while I hold her; now thy blanket, Jaffur. So, now, hold it out, and I will put her into it, and walk by her side. Go gently down the steps, while I hold her."

What could the girl do. In Johur's powerful arms, strong and active as she was, she felt a very child. There had been no chance to run, else the fleetest of the three might not have overtaken her; and now, swathed as she was, and her hands tied to her sides, what could she do? It was in vain that she besought Johur to let her go; in vain appealed to his pity, to his good, kind heart, or adjured him by his mother, by his sister, and by Alla and the saints, to let her go. It was all in vain. Nor could her piteous shrieks be heard among those grim rocks, or attended to by the men who bore her on at the utmost speed the rocky path would admit of. In her agony she bit her lips till the blood flowed.

Her incessant cries grew hoarser and hoarser, her hair had become loosened, and hung dishevelled over her face, and her throat and eyes were parched and burning. Her piteous cries had dwindled into low moans, of which "Alla! Alla! Alla!" was all that could be heard; and under the shock of seizure, and the horrible anticipations which it involved, the free, active life of the girl, perhaps, only preserved her senses.

At last she was sensible of having reached level ground, and saw

that a door was opened, which, as the men carried her in, was shut behind her and bolted. Then two of the palace eunuchs, whom she knew by sight, took her, as she was lying in the blanket, across the court to another door, Johur remaining by her side, blubbering like a child, and praying her to forgive him, but she could answer nothing. She could not then collect her thoughts to speak even a word; but they returned to her as two women advanced as she arose from the ground where she had been deposited, one of whom took her in her arms, and then cracked her finger-joints against her own temples.

"Welcome!" she cried, "O bride. Welcome, in the name of Ibrahim and Zapoora; welcome to thy lover's house, where thou hast gold, and jewels, and dignity, and a noble love awaiting thee."

Zóra looked at the speaker with her great eyes distended by terror and outrage, and would have flown at her like a young tigress had not the other woman intervened.

"Do not speak to her, Máma Luteefa; be quiet!" cried Shireen-bee. "Don't you see she is mad? Is this a time to speak of jewels, and riches, and a lover? Be quiet, I say. Come, my lamb, my dove, my pretty bird, come; do not be afraid; drink some cool water, and sit down and rest, thou wilt recover presently; come!"

But Zóra pushed the woman fiercely away, dashing the silver cup of water to the ground, rushing to a corner, where she crouched

down like a wounded animal, drawing the scarf round her head and body. The women were afraid of her. Her utterly dishevelled hair hung in wild masses about her breast and neck ; her lips were white and dry, flecked with blood and foam, which had dried there ; her cheeks were already hollow and sunken, and of an ashy grey colour, while her eyes seemed sunk in their sockets, and flashed with the angry glare of a panther.

"Mercy on us!" said Máma Luteefa, trembling, "she looks as if she would spring on us like a wild cat, and tear us to pieces. What is to be done with her? Yet she is beautiful, Shireen-bee, most beautiful in her passion. Hush! here is the Nawab; what will he do?"

As the woman spoke, Osman Beg entered the apartment. "What have ye done with her?" he said, sharply. "Johur told me she was here."

Máma Luteefa pointed to the corner, which was somewhat dark. "There she is," she said, rising. "We cannot get her to speak ; she will not drink water, and sits there growling like a wild cat. We are afraid of her, Nawab Sahib."

"Afraid!" he said, savagely ; "afraid! Why 'tis thy trade, Máma Luteefa, to fit brides for their husbands. Afraid!" and he stepped hastily across the room, and seizing Zóra by the arm, dragged her to her feet. "This the beauty they promised me?" he said scornfully, flinging away the girl's hand.

"Do not fling away thy destiny, my lord," said Máma Luteefa. "Behold she is beautiful, more lovely than I ever thought for. That is no low-born maiden; but whoever she is, she hath blood as good as thine, Osman Beg."

The action of the Nawab had roused all Zóra's dormant energy. "Let me go! let me go!" she cried, passionately. "Let me go! Abba is waiting for me. He will die if I do not go to him! For the love of Alla, let me go! Thou wouldst not insult a Syud's child? By your mother's honour, stay me no longer, and I will pray for thee during thy life. By the honour of and life of Queen Chand I implore thee to let me go, or I shall die, and Abba will die. How often hath the old man been kind to thee; how often sent thee medicine when thou wert ill." She had brushed aside the hair from her face mechanically as she spoke in broken words, and stood before him with her face flushed and her eyes blazing. "Insult and dishonour to me, to a Syud's child!" she continued, indignantly; "it cannot be. Nawab, if thou hast ought of justice and mercy in thy heart, have the door opened and let me go free!"

"Ha!" returned the Nawab, in a low, hissing voice, "let thee go? No, a thousand times no! Thou art very beautiful, Zóra," he continued, almost tenderly, "and I accept my destiny. For good or for evil, for honour or dishonour, I accept it as it was sent. Thou shalt be my wife, Zóra, whether thou wilt or no. Need I, Osman Beg, ask permission of a wilful child? Go to! be not a

fool, Zóra! Riches and jewels may not tempt thee, but I will have thy love, if it be only to trample it in the dust and fling it away. Dost thou hear? Who defies Osmán Beg perishes; yet thou mightest live in honour, and have children about thy knees, and thy grandfather living in peace until he died. Choose, then, what thou wilt. Once thy grandfather rejected me with scorn, now my turn has come."

Zóra had been tottering as she stood; and as she watched the horrible expressions which followed each other over the Nawab's face, she became terrified, and sank fainting to the ground.

"Do not kill her, Nawab Sahib!" said Máma Lúteefa, rising to support Zóra, as did also Shireen. "Do not terrify her to death. If anyone had said such words to me, and looked so fierce, and twirled his moustachios as you did, I should have died outright. It is well if this child be not dead already. Look up, my sweet, and drink. Good! now thou wilt be better." But Zóra was not better; as the water had touched her lips she fainted again.

"Instead of all your violence," said Luteefa, drawing herself up, "you should have approached her with blandishments, filled her mouth with sugar-candy, and put a string of pearls round her neck, and greeted her with a blessing. Instead of which, Alla defend us! you have terrified her out of her wits; and she is but a tender child;" and she took up the girl's head and laid it on her lap, smoothing away the dishevelled hair and wiping the dry lips with

a moistened handkerchief. "Look how lovely she is, my lord, and bless Alla and me that she is thy destiny."

"Máma Sahiba," returned the Nawab, with a sneer, "thou knowest the old saying, 'Pigeons mate with pigeons, and hawks with hawks.' I am no pigeon, nor is she; we are hawks, and will live in our own fashion. She hath ever been free and wild, with no control; now she will find she hath a master, like the young colt who rears and plunges when he feels the bit and the spur, but soon discovers that it's best to go quietly. Take her up, and put her on a bed; bathe her and soothe her; put on any clothes ye will. To-morrow the Nika will be performed, and the old man will submit to what he cannot avert."

"To-morrow!" cried the women, in a breath. "Do you think we can prepare her by to-morrow? Weeks might pass before she consents."

"I have said it," he replied; "and did I wait for her consent, I should not fulfil my destiny. I cannot recall spoken words. See ye to what ye have to do; why need she know? When the Moolla has spoken the Nika, she is mine, and cannot escape. See ye to it!" and he went out haughtily.

"What can we do? what can we do?" cried Máma Luteefa, whimpering, and wringing her hands. "If it were known in Moodgul that I had any hand in this violence, I should lose all my practice, and my honour, and my respect"—and she counted these

upon the tips of her fingers—"and my wealth, and my reputation. Yes, I knew they were five. But I never had a hand in anything like this before; and I will tell it in the bazaars; I will cry it from the house top; yea, I will sit in the gate of the mosque and cry it to the faithful as they go to prayers," exclaimed the dame, by way of climax. "I will even go to Queen Chand's feet, and tell it there. What do I care?"

"Beware! Máma Luteefa," said Shireen-bee, with her finger on her lips; "those unblessed eunuchs are always prying about, and might hear thee. Let us take the girl in from this cold place; and, I think, if we sent for Goolab-bee, who knows her, she might be of use; Zóra would speak to her!"

Now Goolab-bee was the seller of pán. Her husband kept the only shop in the village. Of course she knew Zóra perfectly. It was her hour for coming, too; she never failed, for she must deliver her parcel before sunset, that she might get home again before dark.

Zóra had recovered from the faint, and had sat up, looking wildly about her. Her mouth was so parched that she now drank with avidity the water that was offered to her, and held out the cup for more. She would not speak, but covered up her head in the sheet that had been thrown over her. Máma Luteefa, thinking that a familiar name would rouse her, said kindly, "Do not fret,

my fairy, Goolab-bee will be here directly, and you can talk to her."

"Goolab! where is she? Oh! bring her to me if ye have any pity!" cried Zóra; and, almost as she spoke, the voice of the woman was heard without, and she was called in as she entered. Zóra rose from the bed, and rushed into her arms. "Oh! save me, mother! save me!" she cried; "take me away, they have brought me here by force, and I shall die!"

No one in the village had yet heard of the outrage; the old man only fretted that his child was away so long.

"Zóra," said the woman, bursting into tears, "thou here! My child! my child! this is no place for thee. Come away with me. Abba will be missing thee, and grieving sorely."

"She cannot go," said Máma Luteefa, grimly. "She is to be the Nawab's bride. This is only the usual shyness, and thou canst explain all to her."

"Leave us alone, then," said Goolab. "I wish to hear all from her own lips;" and the others, thinking this but reasonable, left them alone.

And Zóra told all—how she had been carried off by the slaves; how the Nawab had threatened her, and how she feared the worst. "The two women are kind," she said, "but I cannot trust them. How can I escape, mother? he is merciless."

"There is no hope from him; but do not live without hope, my child. Alla, the Most High, protects the orphan. I will go to my husband, who is a wise man, and can advise us. I will take him to thy grandfather, and tell him too. If he consent, all may be well."

"No! no! no!" cried the girl. "I would sooner die!"

"Wait, then. I will persuade Máma Luteefa to put off the Nika, and I will come to thee early to-morrow. Thou art quite safe to-night; but eat nothing. As you live, do not trust them. Here is some parched rice. As I left the shop I filled my pocket from the basket, to eat as I came up the hill. There, tie it in the end of the sheet; there is enough to stay hunger till I come again. And now I must go, and I shall need a torch as it is. Fear not, my child; you have more friends than you wot of."

"Oh, tell him all, mother!" sobbed the girl, as she clung to Goolab's neck. "Indeed, indeed, I had no thought of this! Oh, mother, I had no thought! I was taken unawares, and tried to leap from the bastion into the river; but Johur held me, and I had no strength to escape. Tell Abba all. I have no wish to live: my honour is gone, and I can but die; and even the river is kinder than he is, for it will hide my shame."

"No! no!" sobbed the woman. "Wait, and put thy trust in the Lord, and do not think of death."

"Have you pacified her?" asked Máma Luteefa, anxiously. "Will she be quiet?"

'Yes, if you do not meddle with her," was the reply.

"And you will come to-morrow?"

"I will," replied Goolab, and hastened away.

CHAPTER X.

HOW THE NIGHT PASSED.

THE evening wore on, the golden sunset faded, and the stupendous mass of the fort became grey and dim; while on the uppermost towers the light lingered, as if loth to leave them. Still the old man hoped and hoped, and his old servant comforted him, or tried to do so, though she could not conceal her own sad fears. Had Zóra slipped and fallen into the river or into a crevice of the rocks? Had she and Ahmed been attacked by the panthers, which began to growl as the day declined? Whom could she send to see? She dare not venture herself or leave her master. Then the night fell on all suddenly; and the old man, blind as he was, knew the change from day to night had come. He was very restless, groping his way into the courtyard, and feeling in every room and corner with his staff. "Zóra! Zóra! Zóra!" he cried almost unremittingly, "where art thou? Come to me, come to me! I bid thee not delay. Oh, I shall die if thou comest not." Then he went into the little mosque, cried the evening call to prayer, and waited, but no one came. "Why had all deserted him, and Zóra too?"

When he had finished his prayer he got up and went into the house, and sat down in his usual place. "Where is Zóra?" he asked of the old servant; "hath she not come?"

"No," replied Hoosein-bee; "I daresay she is with her sick children. One is very ill, she told me so this morning; perhaps it is dying, and she is with it." It was a poor attempt to satisfy herself and calm the old man's fears, and it was all she could do to check her own sobs.

"It is night now," said her master, in a trembling voice; "the pigeons have ceased to coo, and the air is chilly. Why delayest thou, Zóra, Zóra, Zóra?" and the piteous, wailing cry began again, as he rocked himself to and fro. Sometimes he thought the panthers had killed her; again that she had fallen between the frightful crevices of the rocks and was lost. "Oh, child! so beloved, art thou dead? Dead! and the old man living? Nay, there is no justice in it. Why did Alla let her die?"

"Peace!" cried Hoosein-bee, rebuking him; "art thou accusing God? I loved the child as well as thou didst, but if the Lord hath taken her, dare we refuse her to Him? What does it matter for us, who are old and will soon die? Peace! someone will find the child and bring her in, then it will be time enough to weep."

"I have sinned," returned the old man, submissively; "I will not complain: whatever her destiny was, I could not avert it, Ameen! Ameen!" and he rocked himself to and fro as before.

"And yet," he muttered to himself, "her horoscope was fine, and there were happiness, and honour, and children, and wealth in it. And I believed that; but it may have been a deceit of Satan; and I shall never hear her sweet voice again, nor feel her soft hands about me, alas! alas!"

"I see a torch coming from the village gate," cried Hooseinbee, who had been watching from the door. "There are a man and a woman, and the torch-bearer. Master! master! they come hitherwards; they will surely have news. Let us vow offerings to the saints if Zóra be safe! Oh, Syud, dost thou hear?"

But the old man could not speak; he only rose and tottered to the door. "Are they come?" he asked, tremblingly. "Hooseinbee, who are they?"

"I see them now, master," she said; "only Peeroo and his wife Goolab-bee."

"What can they know about the child?" he returned, peevishly. "Why do they come when I am in grief?"

"Be quiet, master," she replied; "they know, else they would not come. Hark! they are calling."

"Here; I am here," she continued. "Is Zóra with you?"

"No! we will tell thee;" and they hurried forward. But when they entered the house it was no easy matter to break the tidings they brought to Zóra's grandfather. He sat trembling and speechless at first. His darling gone, only to be returned to him dis-

honoured and impure. His little Zóra, his beloved, his stay and support; and he blind and aged. His fairy-face, his apt scholar, all the endearing terms he had ever spoken, came from him with sighs and groans. "Oh!" he cried, "if she were only dead, so that she were pure; but polluted!"

No one could offer a word of comfort, and the pán seller and his wife could devise no means of consolation.

"Let me go to him!" cried the Syud, passionately, as he rose up. "Give me my sword, I will cut him down on his own threshold—before his slaves. Let him kill me! Ah, that would be welcome, now honour is gone! Dishonoured!" he exclaimed, after a pause. "Dishonoured! Pain has come, blindness has come, and helplessness and poverty, but never dishonour. Yea, O merciful God, I would die, I would die! O friends, take me to him, that he may slay me."

It was no use trying to soothe this incoherent raving, and they let it have its course, till the old Syud was nearly exhausted; then Hoosein-bee brought him a cup of water, and he drank it greedily. "I am ready to go," he said, "let us depart;" and he tried to wind his scarf about his waist, and groped for his staff.

"Huzrut," said Peeroo, speaking for the first time, "what the good Alla sends us we must bear; and thou, our teacher, and a man devoted to His service, ought to show us an example. Listen, Zóra is not harmed yet, and no harm can come to her but from

violence from thee. I have thought over all my wife told me, and we must get the child away while she is safe. If the Nika be said, neither thou nor any of us can help her. When Ahmed heard what my wife said, he drew his sword and swore he would go and kill the Nawab or die. Foolish man ! His head would have been off his shoulders in the twinkle of an eye, and his body cast out to the jackals, and vultures, and kites. I made him reasonable, and he put up his weapon. Then we consulted. 'No one can help her but Runga Naik,' said I. 'That is a blessed thought,' said he. 'Someone must go for Runga,' I said; and Ahmed said someone must go; and we sat with our fingers between our teeth thinking. Then my wife said, 'What are you thinking about? There is only one man, and that is Kaloo, the Beydur; send him.' Kaloo is a true man, Huzrut; and would go through fire and water to serve thee, Huzrut, and Zóra, for ye saved his child. Well, Ahmed went for Kaloo, and we told him how the matter stood. 'I know the way into the zenana by the broken wall,' he said, 'and I will go and stab the Nawab in his sleep; who will know of it? I am not a Beydur if I fail.' Well, we thought this would do, but my wife said, 'Let there be no murder, it would bring a curse on Zóra. Leave the Nawab to Alla and his destiny. Send for Runga.' And Kaloo said, 'Yes, it is good, and I will go for him. He is at Kukeyra, I know, for I ought to have been with him; they have a play there, and will be up all night. I will call on him to come

in the name of the Syud, and if he won't, I can only return and kill the Nawab as he is asleep.' 'Very good,' we said; 'if there is no other remedy thou shalt slay the Nawab;' and he bound up his loins, took his bundle of gourds from the roof, and his sword and shield, and is gone: he will be far across the river by this time, and by daylight Runga will be here. That is what we have done, Huzrut, and here is Ahmed to speak for himself."

"It was all my fault, Huzrut," exclaimed the worthy fellow, bowing his head between the old Syud's knees, and sobbing. "I ought never to have left her, but I was afraid, and she knew Johur so well. It was true the Nawab wanted me, but it was an idle message to the Moolla that he wanted him; and I was going up to say he could not come then, when I met Goolab-bee, and she told me all. So, my prince, thou must be patient, and wait for Runga. Inshalla! all will be well. He and his men are able to take a man and his bed up, as he sleeps, and carry them so that he never wakes. Kaloo is gone, and we shall hear by daylight what comes of his errand. Let me see; three hours to Kukeyra, and it is now the first watch of the night. Then three hours to return, and perhaps an hour there. Men can't fly you know, my prince; but Runga Naik and Kaloo are no laggards. Let Peeroo go; I and Goolab-bee will watch by you till daylight."

"Ye are kind, ye are kind," said the Syud, "but there should be no murder. If I should never see my child again, let there be

no murder. Let him live, and let the just Alla deal with him as He listeth. But, O Zóra! O my child! may all be well with thee, for I am helpless and blind, very helpless."

"Give him his opium," whispered Goolab to Hoosein, "and let him sleep." It was a merciful thought, for the aged man slept quietly through the night. As day was near the dawn, he woke, but felt as it were stunned by his great grief. "Zóra!" he cried, "get me water for the ablution, it is day." Then he remembered his great sorrow. "Zóra! who told me she was with the Nawab? Is it so, or have I had an evil dream?"

"Why should we tell you a lie, father?" said Hoosein-bee "Zóra is not here, she is in the palace. God help her!"

"Yes," returned the Syud, "she is dishonoured," and he lay down again and moaned piteously. "O my darling! wert thou dead and in honour I should mourn thee till I die. Now, what will become of me? Alla! merciful Alla! send thine angel quickly, that he may take my spirit; behold thine aged servant is ready. I will await him," he murmured softly, "let him come;" and he lay down again, turned to the wall, and covered his face.

"I think he will die," said Goolab, wiping her eyes; "the shock has been too great for him."

"It were perhaps better he should die than hear of further misery," said her companion. "Why do not they come? Runga Naik should be faithful."

Hoosein-bee had hardly spoken, when she heard the door of the outer court opened gently, and the voice of Ahmed, who had been watching without, speaking to some others. After a few moments he entered the room, and said, "Is he not awake? Runga is here! Is he to come in?"

"Runga!" cried the Syud, rising on his arm; "ah! he alone can save the child: let him come. Save her, friend," he continued, attempting to get up, as he heard Runga Naik enter. "Save her, and she will bless thee. And I—what can I do—who am blind?"

"Give me your blessing," returned the Beydur; "put your hands on my head, and I shall not fail. If I return not with Zóra, believe that I am dead. Have no care how we bring her, but ere the morning breaks to-morrow thou shalt have her in thy arms. Under God's help we will bring her to thee."

"But there will be bloodshed—murder, perhaps. O Runga, shed not blood!"

"It would be easy for me, with fifty good fellows, to hide in the panthers' dens, and carry the palace before any one knew of us," returned Runga, laughing; "but no force is needed, only contrivance, unless violence has been done; and then the Nawab dies. Nor would it be justice to save him. We Beydurs often take justice into our own hands if we can get it by no other means; and who can say we are wrong?"

"And who will protect us if thou bring Zóra here? I cannot help her."

"It is a sad thing, father," returned the Beydur. "Listen! but I must speak boldly. If I bring her, ye cannot stay here; ye must come with me. Across the water the Nawab and his slaves have no power, and there a thousand good swords and guns are ready to protect ye both. But wilt thou come, even for a while? Zóra and you saved his life whom I love, and shall I abandon you to grief?"

"Let it all go, though I loved it. I am but a Fakeer, and fear no change, for Alla will keep me."

"We will take what we can with us, Huzrut; and now lie down again and sleep, for we have much to do. When art thou going to the palace, Goolab-bee?" he asked of her. "Come with me, and I will explain what is to be done;" and he took her out into the court. "Ahmed tells me thou art true," he said, "else I am silent; but thou canst do much."

"She and Abba saved my child, my Pearoo, and I would go through fire for her," was the reply. "I am going up the hill at sunrise to deliver my first bundle of pán, and I shall see her. In the afternoon I go again. What am I to say?"

"Tell the child not to sleep, not to eat; 'tis but a day's fast. At the third watch of the night two great owls will hoot near the wall of the kitchen where it is broken. If she comes after the third hoot, well; if not, I will come for her. Where is she?"

"In the court next to the kitchen court," said Goolab; "and

there is no door to it. I went in yesterday by the broken wall, for the servants all use it now, and have made a pathway."

"Good," he returned; "mind, the third hoot. She must be awake and ready, and fear not. Tell her Runga Naik comes to her for Meeah's sake—would he were here, dame; would he were here. Now go! I shall rest here, and we will get what we can down to the boat as best we can."

Goolab-bee hastened away, took her bundle of pán on her head, filled her capacious pocket with parched rice, and hied up the hill with all the speed she could. She entered the kitchen court by the gap in the wall, meeting the Nawab's cook, who was one of her gossips.

"That won't be half enough, Goolab-bee," said the woman, pointing to the bundle of pán; "we are to have the Nika to-night, and more will be wanted. There will be a great feast for my lord's Nika, and you are invited to it."

I suppose he has satisfied Zóra-bee, then," she returned, carelessly. "I will bring more pán in the evening."

"Oh, yes, she is quite satisfied; Shireen-bee told me so. She is quite ready. You know all brides require a little smoothing down. But go and see her yourself; some good fresh pán will refresh her."

"Goolab went into the next court. There was no door between them, only a curtain made of coarse black blanket. She pulled this aside, and saw Zóra sitting in the cloister of the court before

the door of the room she had been in. The two women sat by her, and one of the eunuchs stood with his arms folded, at a short distance from them, idly leaning against the wall.

"Mother!" cried Zóra, in a husky voice, stretching out her arms; "mother, oh, come to me; they will not let me go to thee!"

"Ah, poor darling!" said Máma Luteefa, "we brought her out here into the cool morning air, for she did not sleep; we watched her by turns all the night, and offered her food and water, but she would not eat or drink. Now if she would take a mouthful of plain kicheri she would be better. Take her in, and speak to her; she knows you, and will tell you we have done all we could; and my lord sent early to know how she had slept, and is anxious about her, as the Nika is fixed for to-night," she whispered, "but don't tell her."

"Come, my darling," said Goolab, "come with me, I will put thee to sleep, and watch by thee." She led Zóra to the bed where she had been laid the night before, and they were alone. The women sat without, looking in now and then, but did not disturb them.

"I have not slept, mother, though I feigned to do so. I have not spoken to them. They have been trying to persuade me to submit, but, oh, mother, I hate him! I should die if I remain longer here."

"Not long, my treasure," replied Goolab. "Runga Naik is come. Now listen, for we must not be seen to speak much; at the third hour of the night he will come and hoot like an owl, and at the third hoot thou art to go out to him by the gap near the kitchen wall. There is nothing to prevent thee. And if thou dost not go to him, he will come to thee. Fear not, and may Alla love thee and keep thee."

"I will do it," whispered the girl, throwing her arms round Goolab's neck. "If they see me, they will kill me; but I do not fear death. And Abba, how is he?"

"He is looking for thee." Till then they had spoken in Canarese, now Goolab spoke in the Dekhan dialect of Hindostanee, so that the women could hear. "Now sleep, Zóra; sleep, my darling. I will not leave thee." And she patted the girl gently, and crooned a low lullaby, as she would have done to one of her own children, holding up her finger to the women who were chattering outside. When Zóra's soft breathing assured her that the girl slept, she got up and joined the two women outside. "Zóra sleeps," she said; "she was weary, and in a strange place. No wonder she lay awake. Now, when she wakes, I will get her to eat something."

"Oh, do!" said the women, in a breath. "We could never do it. Poor child! if she only ate."

Zóra slept an hour or more, woke, and called to her old friend.

"I have had pleasant dreams," she said, simply. "I was with Maria, and she looked like an angel; and he was there," and she hid her face in Goolab's bosom; "and he said, 'Zóra, do not fear;' and, oh! his voice was sweet and tender."

"Now thou must eat, my soul; I will go to the cook myself. The Nawab's kicheri will be ready now, and it will be certain to be safe." The cook was very amiable, and readily gave what was wanted, with which Goolab-bee returned. "See, she will eat now," she said to Máma Luteefa; "I thought I could persuade her."

"Thou art a blessed woman," returned Luteefa. "If I had gone on my knees to her she would not have touched a morsel. Let her use my basin and ewer, the water will refresh her!"

And Zóra ate as much as she could, for she was weak from hunger and violent excitement, and felt strengthened. Her features resumed much of their old expression, but there was a look of determination about the eyes, and in the set lips, which was new to her old friend, who rejoiced to see it. Goolab could not delay longer. "I shall be up again in the afternoon," she said, "and will tell Abba thou art well; meanwhile be not afraid."

CHAPTER XI.

SAVED.

MEANWHILE the day wore on. To the world without in its usual fashion; but to Zóra in inconceivable misery and terror. She dare not ask the women what was going to happen; she dare not even think of her danger, which was an ever-present weight, impossible to throw off or shape into reality. Her mind was indeed in a chaos of thought. She prayed incoherently, sometimes to Alla and the Prophet, sometimes to the blessed Mother of Jesus, of whose tender pity and compassion Maria had often told her, and taught her some brief Canarese prayers. The two women sought to draw her into conversation, but she remained silent; and offered to bathe and dress her, but she refused, and resisted them with a glare of defiance which frightened them both, and they at last desisted. Nothing could induce her to eat a morsel, though their own food was savoury enough. Zóra only took a few grains of her friend's parched rice now and then from her little store, hiding it under her, and concealing her face while she ate them; and the women chattered together, smoked their hookahs, ate pán, and sometimes dozed; but the horrible eunuchs sat at the

door, conversing in a low tone in a language which she did not understand.

The evening arrived at last, and the lamps were lighted in the palace. Zóra had been sensible that something was going on in the hall of audience, for the noise of men's voices and pattering feet came to her sometimes. The Nawab's furashes were in fact decorating the hall with a few garlands of leaves and flowers, and spreading a clean white cloth over the usual carpet, placing lamps in the niches of the wall, and others near the Nawab's seat on the floor.

Presently the Nawab, after proclamation of his titles by the attendants, came in and took his seat in the usual place. He was gorgeously dressed in cloth of gold, as befitted a ceremonial; but all the usual preparations for a marriage were wanting. No women sang the marriage greeting and blessing, or hung garlands of flowers about his neck. No marriage music was played without. His slaves and attendants stood around in silence, and some of the soldiers of the fort and petty officers came in one by one, saluted the Nawab, and sat down on their heels close to the wall, grimly, and with their swords resting across their knees.

The abduction of Zóra had become known to all in Juldroog, and all wondered while they deplored it; and those who had assembled were speaking in low whispers. It seemed as if, had any one given the signal, the Nawab's life would be terminated

at once; but no one moved, and the Nawab preserved the same gloomy silence. "She is my fate," he murmured to himself, "and I go to meet it. They say that she has neither eaten nor slept; but what of that?"

"I beg to represent," said Janoo, who was a privileged buffoon and jester, "that these worthy gentlemen are like a court of horned owls; when one hoots they all hoot; and if no one hoots, they sit blinking at each other in silence. Cheer up, brother owls! for here comes the Moolla, and he will hoot to some purpose."

"Peace, fool!" cried the Nawab, angrily; "is this a time for mockery? Be silent!"

"Indeed, no," retorted the man, with a grimace. "This, O friends, is to be a marriage, and his reverence there is to perform it; and if ye are all as solemn as ye are at a funeral, ye had better take out your handkerchiefs, and keep them ready for the crying when the final blessing is given. But this is a marriage, friends, and the beautiful Zóra is to be the bride. Congratulate the master."

"A marriage!" cried the old Moolla, scornfully, and while the company, who had risen to salute him, were still standing. "A marriage between thee, Osman Beg, and Zóra, granddaughter of Huzrut Syud Ali? Impossible! I forbid it in the name of the Queen and the law. I have seen the Syud, who protests. I must hear from the girl's own mouth that she is willing, and

all the ceremonies must be completed, ere I can perform my functions. Is there no one here to answer for the girl?" As no one stirred, he resumed: "Will no one act as her agent? will no one answer for her dowry?"

"That is my care, Shékhjee," said the Nawab, haughtily; "it is no concern of thine."

"Is it not?" continued the old man; "is it not? Nay, every true Moslim who is present knows that it is. Would any of ye sirs, suffer daughters of yours to agree to a marriage like this?" And a low murmur arose that they would not, which sounded ominous; and some shrank away through the open archways.

"I have but asked two questions, and there is no answer," said the Moolla, looking around. "There are no messengers from the bride, no preparations for a procession. Therefore, friends, bear witness that I refuse to repeat the Qools;* that I refuse to abet violence. I am a helpless old man, who has no force to resist thee, Osman Beg, but in the name of God and the Prophet, peace be on him, I bear witness, even to the death of a martyr, that thou hast done a foul wrong, and I demand the girl Zóra from thee, in the name of Queen Chand. Dohái! Dohái!"

"Insolent!" cried the Nawab, half drawing his sword; "insolent! Thou to call me to account!"

* 100th, 112th, 113th, and 114th chapters of the Koran.

"Be quiet, brother!" cried the buffoon, seizing the Nawab's hand; "thou art a valiant soldier, but wouldst thou murder a man of God?" Meanwhile, as he spoke, many present gathered round the brave old priest, and escorted him out of the assembly. Only a few remained, the profligate, boon companions of the Governor.

"The beginning of my fate!" exclaimed the Nawab, aside. "It is soon begun; but it shall never be said that Osman Beg was frightened by a priest. Away! one of ye take the riding camel, and bring a kazee or a priest from Moodgul before to-morrow evening closes. The camels are beyond the river. See that he takes a hundred rupees with him," he added to the treasurer. "Go! and see it done."

"Now, why be in a hurry," said the buffoon; "I will manage the marriage without further trouble. Where are the two Mámas?"

Luteefa-bee had been sitting behind the curtain, listening to every word that was spoken. "Here am I, Máma Luteefa," she said, advancing into the assembly. "Your slave is present; what would ye have of me?"

"Is Zóra-bee ready, mother?" said the jester, "and willing, and accepts the dowry? And are you her agent? Whisper in my ear."

But the dame was silent. She had been at hundreds of marriages, and this was only insolent buffoonery; she knew the Nawab must wait.

"There," cried Janoo, "behold she tells me that the bride is ready; she is in the trembling condition of ecstasy and love; that she will take all the dowry she can get, and live to enjoy it as long as she can; and so I say the 'Qools,' which his reverence stuck at;" and, sitting down, he began to gabble a jargon which sounded like Arabic, ending with the usual prayer and blessing. The imitation of the old Moolla was complete, and some laughed. But the buffoonery was even too gross for those present, the imitations of the bride's modesty too absurd, and the jest fell cold even upon those profligates.

"Ye may depart," said Osman Beg, rising and passing into his chamber. As he brushed by Luteefa he said in a hoarse whisper,

"Prepare her for to-morrow; she hath escaped me to-day."

"If it had been done," said the dame to herself, "he would have wedded a corpse. Can't he wait, and let me manage things regularly and with order? What can I do by to-morrow? If Goolab leaves us, the girl would dash her head against the wall and die."

Goolab had been a spectator of the jester's mummery, and had a worse opinion of the Nawab's honesty than Máma Luteefa. She had, in fact, the utmost suspicion that foul insult was intended, and only partly veiled by the mummery of the buffoon; but she heard his whisper to the Máma, who now made no secret of it, and that consoled her.

"We have escaped for to-night," she said, as she sat down, with a pious ejaculation. "Ul-humd-ul-Illa! Nothing hath been regular, and there was no kazee present, only the old Moolla, who defied him. Now it is to be to-morrow night, if a kazee can be found, and thou must be willing then, my pearl. The Lord put away evil from thee, and truly from us all."

With what horrible fears Zóra had been filled we will not attempt to describe. She had heard indistinctly the commotion when the old Moolla departed, and she knew his voice well. Then there had been strict silence; but when the buffoon's jargon began, she had believed it was the real service, spoken by another priest, and she lay trembling and gasping for breath in unspeakable horror. But Goolab-bee had already assured her in some degree, and Máma Luteefa's speech gave her a confidence she had hardly hoped to feel.

She lay down on the pillow, and covered herself up. She would eat nothing, though Goolab pressed her, for she was sick with apprehension. After awhile Máma Luteefa and Shireen lay down on their thin cushions, and drawing the heavy coverlets over them, for the night was chilly, were soon fast asleep and snoring. Now and then the eunuch on guard without looked in, and, seeing all quiet, seemed content; and after a while another came and sent him away, and she heard midnight struck on the fort gong. "Three hours more," she thought, "and it will

be time;" and she could almost hear the beating of her own heart. The eunuch on guard moved about now and then, and looked in through the door, yawning. At last she saw him fold his blanket about him and lie down close to the door, and heard him begin to snore loudly. She waited for some time, then arose noiselessly and put out the lamp that was burning in a niche above her head; but there was light enough from without to see by.

The Máma and her servant slept profoundly, and Goolab-bee, who lay beside the bed, did the same. Zóra noiselessly approached the door, but was close to the eunuch. She could see his face distinctly in the moonlight. He lay on his back, his sword in his hand, but was dead asleep like the others. Then, after an interval which seemed interminable, and she had begun to think that Runga could not come, a blessed sound fell on her ear—a low hoot, which seemed answered by another at a short distance among the rocks. Her heart beat violently, but she pressed her hand to her side to still it, while a smile passed over her face as she raised her eyes in prayer. Again the owl hooted, louder than before, and was almost immediately followed by another somewhat shriller and more sonorous, and she could hear the faint echo from the precipices beyond the ravine. "He is ready now," she murmured. "May the good Alla save me!" and she stepped into the court.

The moon shone brightly upon the side of the court where the apartment was, but she moved noiselessly and gently into the shadow opposite, and in an instant more she had gained the door of the kitchen court, drawn aside the blanket curtain, and fled across to the gap. For an instant she paused to notice if any alarm had been given, but all was quiet: the silvery moonlight fell on every object around her, and revealed them—rock and wall, and the ravine of the river beyond, and the cataract, bathed in her rays, and sparkling in flashes as her light struck the moving water.

Above her, on the highest bastion of the fort, a sentinel stood watching, and she saw the glint of his match-lock barrel as he moved. Then she descended a few steps, and a loose stone rolled down the path. She heard the soldier above fling a stone at the place with a curse, conceiving, no doubt, that the noise was occasioned by a prowling panther or hyena. But Zóra was safe now; a tall figure emerges from behind a high rock, and in an instant more she was taken up like a child in Runga's arms. "Silence!" he whispered; "silence, lady! we are not quite free of danger, but there is no alarm as yet; fear not." Then two other men joined them, and they sped on as swiftly as the rough ground permitted.

"I am quite strong now," said Zóra; "let me go, Runga, I will follow thee."

The relief from Zóra's weight enabled Runga to step more

surely, and he led the way. They descended among the rocks for a time, till they reached an apparent hole, where two huge masses of granite met each other. It was all black darkness within.

"Art thou afraid, lady?" asked her conductor; "but have no fear," he added; "the beasts are all away seeking food. Hold by my waistband and tread firmly."

Zóra felt no fear, though she almost shuddered at the intense darkness, and the smell of beasts and bats made her sick and faint. Presently she saw a glimmer of light at the end, and was reassured. "Let who will awake now," said Runga, laughing; "we have thrown dirt on the Nawab's beard, no one has been killed, and thou, Zóra-bee, art safe. I say for his sake, even my master's, you are safe; but had you been harmed, by Krishna! the Nawab had died."

They stood on a small piece of level sward, and she could see the three Beydurs distinctly in the moonlight. They were dressed in their leather caps, and hunting suits also of leather; and their figures, unless they moved, could not have been seen. Zóra could not resist the impulse; she felt she was free, and that these men had risked their lives for hers, and passing rapidly from one to another, she stooped down and touched their feet. She could not speak.

"Look!" said Runga, "yonder is the mosque, and a light is burning; they are looking for us. We have come by the panthers'

den, and who dare follow? Come! we must cross the river ere the dawn rises, and the boats are ready."

There was no need to urge Zóra on. She felt no weakness now, and she ran down the slope, lightly as a fawn, into the well-known path to the bastion. The postern was open, and at her utmost speed she ran along the soft sward to the house, and rushing into the door abruptly, stood panting amidst the group within. "Safe! safe!" she cried; "the good God and Runga have saved me! And Abba, where is he?"

"We have sent him down to the boat," said Ahmed, who was crying like a child. "Come away! come away! All the things are gone; and your books, and clothes, and the lady's picture, all safe long ago."

"Only let me look round the court, and I come," she said; "I will not keep you." All was bare and empty. The morning breeze was just rising, and sighed among the tops of the tamarind trees. Some pigeons had just awakened in the mosque, and were cooing gently. All else was still. It was no time for thought, and Ahmed was calling. They were all assembled now, and Runga led the way at a rapid pace. By the side of the river was a fire of thorns and sticks, and a group was standing around it, amongst it her grandfather, leaning on his staff; and running forward Zóra fell at his feet, and clasped his knees. "He saved me, Abba! he saved me!" was all she could ejaculate. It seemed

to her that her heart was bursting with ecstasy. As for her grandfather, he stood holding his child in his arms, casting his blind eyes up to the sky, and his lips moved gently in prayer. Old Hoosein-bee was already in the boat, sobbing for joy.

"Look!" cried Runga Naik, stretching out his arm. "They have missed you, and are looking for you, Zóra-bee. Look at the torches flitting about the rocks; but thou art safe now, child. Safe, Abba! Say, have I done what I promised? Away with ye!" he cried to the rowers; and under the vigorous strokes of eight oars the boat shot rapidly down the current, and soon reached the opposite shore in safety.

END OF BOOK I.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

BEEJAPOOR.

WESTWARDS from the city of Beejapoor the ground rises in a succession of barren downs, which decline in gentle undulations towards the broad valley of the Done river to the east, the valley of the Krishna to the south, and the general plateau of the Dekhan to the west and north; and they form the most elevated portion of the country lying between the Bheema river to the north and the Krishna to the south. At the period we write of, these downs were uncultivated, as, indeed, from the shallow nature of the stony surface soil, they still are for the most part; and the natural grass was preserved, partly as forage for the great city, and for the Royal cavalry stationed in its vicinity. In a military point of view also it was necessary to keep the ground beyond the suburbs of the city as open as possible on all sides; and in consequence there were few villages, and but little cultivation, except market gardens, attached to any of them.

Beejapoor depended for its supplies of grain upon the fertile

valley of the Done, a singularly productive tract exemplified by the Dekhan proverb, "If the crop in Done fail, who can eat? If the crop ripens, who can eat it?" The Beejapoor downs bore neither trees nor jungle of any kind to break the loneliness of their aspect. Here and there a little low brushwood appeared to struggle for existence; but the demand for firewood was so great in the city, that the bushes were cut down almost as soon as they sprung up, and afforded no corn for wild animals of the larger species. Antelopes, however, were very numerous, and roamed in large herds over the grassy slopes; while wherever a tiny rill, issuing from some spring below the crests of the highest portions of the tract, trickled down a very small valley, its borders were plentifully stocked with feathered game of all kinds and hares.

From the highest points of these downs many a noble view is obtained of the country around. The heights descend by gradual slopes into the less elevated tracts on all sides, producing long, wavy lines, not only of conformation, but of tints blending in exquisite harmony, from the decided though monotonous colours of the foreground to the greys, blues, and dim purples of the far distance. For the most part, on three sides there are no objects to break the continuous uniformity, whose monotony is only varied by difference of colour; but to the northward lies the noble city, then, as now, changing the dreary expanse into a vision of superb splendour; and it is evident that the aspect of the city cannot

have altered in any great degree in effect for the last three hundred years.

The isolated palaces of the suburb of Torwéh, and the gardens which follow the course of the little stream on which they were laid out, appear from a short distance as perfect and as fresh as ever. The groves of tamarind and mango trees, out of which they rise, are still luxuriant; and here and there the feathery palm foliage of a cocoa nut lends additional grace to the view. Even the palaces, though now ruined and roofless, have the appearance of being yet perfect, and stand out of the foliage as if decay and the spoiler had not touched them.

Beyond Torwéh, northwards, the vast city spreads over the plain to the fort and citadel, which terminates the view. The lines of streets are distinct, and that of the principal one, three miles in length, remarkably so; and it is only when the traveller draws near that the illusion is dispelled, and the streets are seen to be lanes amidst borders of crumbling walls, and the whole to be a mass of ruin only broken by the tottering remains of a house, a mosque, a palace, or other building which has resisted the effects of time and desolation. Here and there a few houses remain in clusters, which have, as it were, survived destruction, and have become, indeed, separate villages; but even they seem to be out of place among the general decay of all around them.

As the fort wall is approached at the end of the long street it is

seen to be quite perfect. The noble gateway, with its flanking bastions and loopholed defences, rampart and towers, with their fausse-braye and broad ditch and counterscarp, lead to the supposition that within, at least, prosperity still endures; but this, too, is a delusion, for on every side is ruin even more melancholy and more impressive than that without. In the outer town there had been few buildings calculated to resist time. For the most part built of rough stone, with clay for mortar, and terraced clay roofs, yet had fallen when abandoned to disrepair; but within, the most costly palaces, the magnificent citadel, public edifices which have been palaces, mosques, bazaars, mausoleums, have toppled down into ruins, or show, if they are still entire, the condition of neglect into which they have fallen. Thanks to the British Government, a few of the finest edifices have been placed in good repair, and are so maintained; but all that was private property, palaces, gardens, mosques, mausoleums, have already crumbled away, or are disappearing as fast as their wonderfully tenacious construction will admit of.

With the ruined aspect of Beejapoor, as the traveller now sees it under feelings of wonder and admiration, I have no concern. Those palaces, now desolate, from which the horned owls hoot the night through, have to be restored; those miles of streets have to be rebuilt and repeopled; the busy population which thronged the deserted expanse presented as they were at the period of this

tale, when Beejapoor contained upwards of a million and a half of people, and its Government was the most powerful in the Dekhan, for the power and prosperity of the State and its people were then at their zenith, and all that wealth, taste, and art could do to embellish the Royal city was being freely lavished by men of all conditions, from the young King Ibrahim Adil Shah II. to the nobles, merchants, and religious orders over whom he ruled.

Then, as the spectator, turning round, looked back from the heights we have mentioned beyond Torwéh, the scene was, indeed, magnificent. The palaces of Torwéh, perfect in their noble extent, with their bright terraces, their large carved lattice windows, some of them open, which showed them to be inhabited, were in bright contrast to their present condition of huge misshapen apertures, from which the windows have been torn and removed altogether.

People were moving about these terraces and gardens in all directions, and the song of the drawers of water at the garden wells was borne upon the morning air. Beyond was the busy city and its countless objects, with the smoke rising up from the early fires, and covering it as with a thin blue veil of mist. Palaces, mansions, bazaars, mosques, temples, with their spires, domes, and minarets, were intermingled with the terraced roofs of the houses, and showed no break in the continuity of the streets and suburbs, leading the eye onwards to the fort itself, which terminated the

view, for here the chief interest of the great panorama centred, and the noblest buildings seemed clustered together.

To the right, a little way outside the south-east gate of the city, the noble mausoleum of the Ibrahim Roza was now rising slowly to eventual completion; and at the period we write of, the mere outlines of one of the most superb buildings in India were hardly recognisable; but beyond that, within the fort gate, all the public edifices which now claim the admiration of those who see them, were then at their gayest and brightest—the great grim cavalier which overlooks all; the splendid bastion, on which the largest gun in the world is mounted; the domes of the mausoleum of Ministers of State, Princesses, and Royal servants, rising out of the soft foliage of the Royal deer park. Again, the citadel, with its lines of ramparts, bastions, and wet ditches, its crowd of Royal palaces and public offices, among which the graceful and elegant seven-storeyed edifice reared its dizzy height. Many of them rich with gilding, and all with the perfect appearance of residences and use.

On the northern edge of the citadel stood the Asar Mahal, then recently constructed to contain the sacred relics of the Mussulman faith which had arrived from Mecca, in itself a noble edifice, which of all the Royal buildings is alone perfect as it was left. To the right of the citadel rose the fine domes and minarets of the Jooma Mosque, where six thousand men could kneel at prayer; and

thence the eye, passing over a plain partly bare, used as an encamping and exercising ground, and partly covered by mosques, private palaces, and dwellings, rested upon the huge mass and dome of the mausoleum of Sultan Mahmood; all else seeming to lie at its feet like pigmies. As the dome of St. Peter's towers above all other objects at Rome, so in Beejapoor all seemed dwarfed beside and around this huge structure, which, second only to the Pantheon in outward diameter, was then, as it is still, the glory of Dekhan architecture. Away to the north was a wide, barren plain, often the scene of heavy general actions, dotted here and there with groups of mausoleums, or single edifices, and with a crowd of more humble tombs, lining the high way to the small village of Allapore, which occupied the summit of a height behind; and thence away to the north spread the wavy lines of undulating distance, till they mingled together in the distant horizon.

As yet all was grey, for the sun had not risen; but his beams were fast filling the eastern sky, and tinging the light clouds with crimson and gold, heralding the birth of a new day, and in a few moments more the fiery globe, magnified by the earth mists, rose over the horizon. The change then was as striking as it was superb. The eastern plain seemed filled with a rosy, golden light, and the distinctness of objects was blurred by it; but nearer, every object in the city and plain assumed a new beauty; the sombre

mass of the great mausoleum shone with a roseate glow, its gilded spire flashing in the sun; so also the Jooma Mosque, the delicate Mehturi Mahal, the palaces and gardens within and without the citadel, with their gilded spires and white terraces.

All that the eye had followed while they were yet dimly grey, burst on the sight as if endowed with a fresh life from the new day which had come; even the Royal flag, which had drooped against its staff on the high cavalier, was stirred by the faint breeze which rose with the sun, and fluttered out as if rejoicing in the freshness of the dewy morning, and flags waved from bastions and palaces, and Moslem and Hindoo shrines and temples; while the early Royal music playing out as the sun rose, followed by that of nobles who enjoyed the privilege of the "nóbat," came fitfully and sweetly upon the clear air even to that distance; and the rosy light of morning passing from the higher buildings to the lower, lighted up all in an effulgence which was almost dazzling in its collective splendour.

Ere the sun had risen, a numerous party which issued from the Royal palaces at Torwéh had ridden slowly up the rising ground beyond, and spread out very considerably, evidently with the purpose of beating the grassy slope for game. On the right and left flanks of the line, nearly a mile from the centre on both sides, heavy bodies of cavalry marched at a slow but steady pace onwards, regulating their movements by those of the party in

the centre; sometimes halting, if they had proceeded too far; sometimes despatching parties further to the right and left, to drive the game as much as possible into the centre.

The cavalry—one division being Abyssinians, the other Dekhanis—were accompanied by their accustomed bodies of elephants in their war panoply, and green or scarlet housings; but there was no noisy clash of bells, as was usual when war elephants moved, lest it should disturb the deer, and both bodies of cavalry marched with that deep, hollow, rustling sound which proceeds from large numbers. In the distance, and before the sun rose, they appeared to be dark, heavy masses; but a nearer view would have shown the men to be handsomely, not to say gaily, clad—many wearing shirts of mail, or other defensive armour, and steel morions, round which gay scarfs were wound; while the housings of their horses were as rich and gay as their own dresses. They were by no means uniformly armed, for each man wore what arms he pleased, or in which he was most expert; but with the Abyssinians, with whom were bodies of Persians, Tartars, and other foreigners, the bow seemed to be the favourite; while with the Dekhanis the national spear showed gay fluttering pennons over the mass of their superb force, which gave a livelier effect to their detachment than to that of the other party.

In the centre was a small cavalcade consisting of not more

than twenty persons, all gorgeously attired, who were in attendance upon one to whom all, it was evident, paid extreme deference. Some of these were the chief eunuchs of the State, who, for the most part, were Nubians or Abyssinians; others the chief officers of the hunting establishments, and the commanders of the bodies of cavalry, who attended to receive any orders that might be given to them; and although their splendid costumes and martial figures might well command attention, all seemed to dwindle in interest before the strikingly attractive figure on whom they were in attendance.

This was a lady, who, after the fashion of a man, as was the custom of the Dekhan, rode a milk-white Arab or Dekhan palfrey, of beautiful proportions and evidently high spirit. Its caparisons were of the richest, softest bright blue Genoa velvet, deftly quilted and padded, so that the seat of the saddle was luxuriously soft and comfortable. The whole of the saddle-cloth, housings, and broad crupper piece, as well as the neck and head pieces of the suit, were richly embroidered with heavy gold patterns, studded with seed pearls, in the style for which Beejapoor was then famous, and of which some of the embroidered carpets, throne seats, and curtains, still preserved in the Asar Mahal, frayed and faded now, are interesting examples.

On its crest between its ears stood a plume of glittering feathers, composed of bright gold tinsel, which stood in a socket

of gold set with flashing diamonds, which sparkled at every toss of its beautiful wearer's proud head. The bit, a short curb, was of steel, inlaid with gold and diamonds, while the broad bridle rein, of the same velvet as the housings, was embroidered with seed pearls like the rest of the trappings. The beautiful animal in its perfect caparisons was in all respects an object of true admiration; but, compared with the rider, at once lost interest and dwindled into a secondary place.

She, for it was the Dowager Queen Chand, sat her horse with the most perfect grace and mastery of its often fiery spirit, and her costume, though simple, was suitable to her high rank. On her head she wore a light steel morion, round which a white muslin scarf of the finest texture was bound as a sort of turban, and a handkerchief of the faintest rose colour, with borders of narrow gold tinsel, was tied over the crown and below the chin, so that the face, except the eyes, was concealed. Her tunic, worn high to the throat, was of white cloth of gold of the richest texture, and her breast was crossed by a baldrick of broad gold lace, which was confined at the waist by another white muslin scarf, the gold brocaded ends of which hung down at her right side.

Thus, except the light yellow Persian boots of the softest leather, which reached high above her knees, and were embroidered in white floss silk, there was no positive colour about the Queen's figure, and yet the richness and beauty of her whole equipment were strikingly chaste and elegant.

The Dowager Queen had worn no colour since her widowhood, and that was now long ago. On her arms, from the wrists to the elbows, she wore light gauntlets of steel, inlaid with gold and set with diamonds, which were clasped over her rounded arms; and upon her right hand and wrist was the strong glove and gauntlet on which her favourite falcon sat proudly erect, his light musical jesses clashing with the gentle motion of the well-trained horse. Nothing could have been more perfect than the figure of the Royal lady. Her face could not be seen, but the close-fitting tunic showed a perfect grace of contour; and though the figure was very small and slight, like that of a girl, yet it displayed by the firmness of the seat unwonted ease, strength, and confidence.

The Queen's seat was perfect, not even that of the most practised cavalier could have excelled it. She was seemingly part of the horse itself, while the animal appeared to feel the light weight he bore only as a pleasure to urge him to those bounds and caracoles in which his Royal mistress delighted. It was not often that the Queen could enjoy a morning ride over the downs with true zest, but the freshness of the air, the gallant company around her, the Royal falconers, the gaily caparisoned carts, on which sat the hunting leopards, and the crowd of beaters, grooms, mace-bearers, and others who followed the Royal cavalcade, were for the time truly inspiriting.

On the crest of the first of the long waves of elevation which

have been described the Queen drew rein, and turning round looked over the city. At first the distance was grey and misty, as we have seen it; but as her eyes wandered over the expanse, they seemed to fill with tears, as her bosom heaved responsively.

"I have loved thee like a mother her child," she thought to herself; "and thou art still mine in all thy beauty. How long, how long, O Alla! wilt thou continue it to me and mine? But with all its faults thou hast blessed it, and thy poor servant; and thy mercies none can tell. Other cities have been ravaged, but as yet no enemy hath placed foot in this; and what could a weak arm like mine have done without thee!"

Almost as she spoke the sun rose up, and the golden and rosy light we have already mentioned spread over the whole scene, even to her very feet. Her slight veil had somewhat fallen from her face, and the light now showed a soft rounded cheek, flushed with rich colour by exercise, on which the sun's light rested lovingly; while silent tears, also catching the golden ray, welled up in her eyes, fell over the lids, and trickled down her cheek. There appeared to be no sadness in them, only the outpouring of a great loving heart before its Maker. Then, too, while the light flashed over her own beautiful dress, it caught the spears, the morions, and the armour of the bodies of the cavalry in glittering points, which dazzled the eye and lent fresh splendour to the martial array.

"Come!" cried the Queen, as she turned her horse, "thou hast been impatient, my pearl; and thou, too, Diamond," she said to the horse and the falcon; "but I promise ye a race this morning, if a quarry rise, that shall content ye. Come, sirs, we linger."

Now that the Queen once was again in motion, the main bodies of cavalry on the wings fell back, so as not to interfere with the Royal sport. Two of the light carts of the hunting leopards came to the front, and took their places considerably in advance of the Queen's line, one on each hand, while men with sparrow-hawks or small falcons flew them continuously at quails or partridges as they arose from out of the thick grass. Now scouts on a crest about half a mile in advance made signs that a herd of antelopes was near, with several black bucks in it, and the leopard carts pressed on with somewhat increased speed, the Queen and her line keeping pace with them.

Thus the carts reached the crest of the rise, whence the view to the front was open; but the Queen waited below the crest till she should see whether either of the leopards should be loosed or not, and in a few moments the result was apparent. One of the leopards had its cap removed, the antelope pointed out to it, when it leaped gently from the cart to the ground, making its way gradually towards the herd, which, partly lying, partly grazing, was in the little valley below; while the cart in which it had been fastened was driven on to the right, to keep up

the notice of the deer, who appeared to watch it unconcernedly. Meanwhile, the Queen, with some of her footmen and attendants, pressed up the ridge, whence the scene could be easily and completely watched.

They could see the leopard distinctly making its way down the slope, taking advantage of every inequality of ground, of small bushes, of ant-hills, and even of tufts of grass; creeping softly from one to another, and crouching to the ground if the deer showed the slightest symptoms of alarm. Once a huge black buck, the monarch of the herd, rose from the ground where he had been lying, stretched himself lazily, and ran playfully after some young fawns who had dared to approach him; and the leopard seemed to understand this, for it lay as if dead among some grass of very much its own colour. Presently it looked up, and saw the buck grazing with its head turned away; and a few more moves were made, the leopard crouching whenever there was a chance of being seen.

It was a strange sight to watch the extreme sagacity of the leopard in securing its natural prey. Until it got within a certain distance from which the deer could be run down, anything might cause a failure; some skittish doe or fawn might run and alarm the whole herd, and if so all chance of capture must be abandoned. Now, however, the leopard's runs were shorter and more frequent, and yet there was no alarm; the deer were lying

on a spot where the grass was short and sweet, and there were little mounds here and there which afforded ample cover for their enemy, who was now so near that the Queen could not help exclaiming to one of the falconers near her,—

"Fie on the brute! he is a coward, Ahmed, and shall be shot if he fails!"

"Nay, lady," was the reply, "he is no coward. Your slave never saw him miss. Look!"

As the man spoke the leopard had made at last one spring forward towards the buck, from a distance of some yards; but ere it could seize the deer, it had bounded off at a pace which can hardly be described, followed closely by its pursuer, and for a few seconds it seemed doubtful whether the speed of the deer or the leopard would be the greater. The actions of both were beautiful; the deer with its head thrown back, its body stretched till its belly almost touched the ground; the leopard's movements so rapid that they could hardly be followed by the eye. But there was no doubt at last; putting forth all its speed and strength, the leopard seized the buck by the throat with its powerful teeth, and with the impetus both rolled over together.

"Shabash! Shabash! Well done, well done! good Julloo!" cried the Queen, enthusiastically, as she raised her bridle hand and cantered down the slope, as at the same time the leopard's cart was rapidly driven to the spot, and the customary offering

made to the animal to induce it to quit its prey. "Shabash! Julloo! Shabash!" said the Queen, as, reaching the spot, she guided her snorting horse up to the cart, and patted the sleek skin of the leopard. "Thou hast done well, my son."

"And he is ready to do the same again, lady," said his keeper, with a profound reverence, "if he may, and if your Majesty be not weary."

"Nay, Hussein, I am never weary of good sport. Time has been, as thou rememberest, when I, a girl, rode with our Royal master on the plains beyond the Krishna from morning till sundown, and the sweetest meals we ever ate were those that thou and thy fellows used to cook for us. Well, some such thoughts as these came over me as I stood on the top of the crest yonder; and 'tis no harm telling them to thee, for thou hast not forgotten old days."

The man looked up, his rough cheeks and grizzled beard wet with tears, and kissed her foot reverently.

"No, lady," he said, gently. "Those who never forget the humble offices of their poor servants live in their hearts, and those of their children. Such an one art thou, and wilt be till Alla calls thee to join him who is gone! Surely thy poor servant is blessed this day that he hath brought back the memories of old times that were so happy!"

"And now away; take thy place; there will be no more deer

till the next ridge is passed ; and this herd took to the west, I think. Then we will go southwards, and beat round by the Talikota road ; perchance we may find a heron or a floriken, for the falcon is impatient ;" and she rode on up the gentle slope before her, which was clothed with the low soft white grass in which floriken like so much to lie ; and she had not reached the crest before a fine bird rose silently out of the grass and flew lazily on.

In an instant, however, the Queen had loosed the hood of her favourite, and cast off the cord which tied its leg to her wrist, and the noble bird at once darted in pursuit of its quarry. The Queen followed, and her spirited horse strained at the bit to increase his speed ; but the Queen contented herself with keeping the birds well in view, and watching the final swoop, though it might be prolonged. Indeed, few of the Royal falcons could ever succeed in striking down a floriken strong on the wing ; its powerful swift flight, its endurance of distance, were very different from the comparatively sluggish flight of a heron ; and it required a really good rider and horse to follow the direct flight taken. Fortunately, on these downs the ground was firm if sometimes stony, and the Queen rode on nearly at full speed until she saw that except a few distant horsemen she was quite alone. Still she did not slacken her speed, and alternately ridge and valley, valley and ridge, were passed ; and still the birds flew. At last the floriken turned, and strove to evade its pursuer ; but the effort

was futile. After a few turns the falcon struck it down, and began tearing off its feathers.

Just then a man, who was evidently one of the cavaliers of the city, dashed up at full speed, and dismounting from his horse began to call in the usual manner of hawkers to the falcon, but the bird did not know him, and paid no heed to his endeavours; and at this moment the Queen, dashing over a slight eminence by which she had been concealed, and crying to the stranger to refrain, drew rein and called to the bird herself, at the same time tossing a small strip of flesh in the air, which she took from a pouch at her saddle-bow.

"Who art thou that interferest with the Royal falcons, and who taught thee falconry to attempt to secure a hawk in that clumsy fashion? Who art thou?" she said, sharply.

"Your Majesty has forgotten me," said the young man, removing the scarf with which he had tied up his face during his march; "and yet may allow your slave, Abbas Khan, to kiss your feet;" and the young man advanced and made a low obeisance, even to the ground.

"Mercy of God!" cried the Queen; "and thou art surely in the flesh! Why, they told me thou hadst been killed in battle; then that thou wert sorely wounded, and dying in some fort."

"Thy slave is in truth here, and his destiny is propitious that he hath thus met your Majesty alone. But is it seemly that my

Royal mistress should be thus alone? Where be all the laggard attendants?"

"No one could ride with me, Khan. None of their heavy war chargers have so fleet a foot as my Mótee. Nay, by all the saints, he seems as if he had not forgotten thee."

"Nor need he, lady," was the reply, "for I have often fed him and exercised him, and have taught him some of his paces." And Mótee had not forgotten his kind teacher; he buried his nose in his hand, and rubbed it gently against the young Khan's breast.

"And who is this?" cried the Queen, smiling, as a strange figure rode up on an ambling palfrey. "By all the saints, was there ever so strange a figure on a horse!"

"It is my friend, the Senhor Padré of Moodgul, whom I received orders to bring with me. Dismount," he said to the priest; "this is the Queen, and thou shouldst give her thy salutation."

"Nay, but my blessing," said the priest, humbly, kneeling on one knee, and taking off his hat and bowing low. "The blessing of God and Mary the mother of Jesus be on the most noble and virtuous lady of her time!"

"The blessing of a holy man is ever acceptable to me," said the Queen, with a gentle inclination.

The Padré had made no alteration in his usual priestly attire. His broad-brimmed shovel hat of his order covered his head; his

black cassock descended almost to his feet; inside, he wore a pair of strong riding drawers and his under garments, and a pair of simple sandals on his feet.

"A Nazarene Fakeer," continued the Royal lady; "as such thou art welcome to our house. But who taught thee to speak such excellent Persian? I could follow thee at once."

"I learned it in my Lord's service, as I learned Canarese also," replied the Padré; "but I speak Canarese better."

"Wonderful!" cried the Queen; "it is even as I heard when I sent for thee. Abbas Khan, wilt thou see to the good man's comfort till I can give my own orders?"

"And his sister, Doña Maria, is in the litter which they have set down yonder."

"I had hoped so," returned the Queen. "I fear I shall not be able to see her at once. We shall be at Torwéh till to-morrow evening, and the next day there will be a durbar in the gilded palace. Fail not to come."

"And my uncle, lady?"

"He is away with the King towards Purendah. There is no peace, I grieve to say, with Ahmednugger; but thou hast heard this. And thy wound is well?"

"It is quite healed, and now I am strong again, ready for my Queen's service wherever it needs me."

"Ah, well! we will speak of that by-and-bye, Abbas Khan;

but meanwhile have great care to thyself, for I have heard unpleasant rumours, and thou knowest I am thy well-wisher. Do not cross the Abyssinians; they are not friendly, I hear, to thee. But I cannot explain more here, a body of them is in the field with me, and it would be well if thou couldst avoid them. Take the road by the Roza, it will be the safest."

As she spoke the Queen turned her horse, and without waiting a reply, cantered up the slope by which she had come, and meeting her attendants at some distance, displayed her trophy of the chase.

"Ye were but laggards," she said, with a smile, to the eunuchs. "I, and my Diamond, had all the honour, had we not?" and she stroked her glossy favourite's plumage, caressingly.

"But how did your Majesty get the bird? Who held your stirrup? Surely you have been too rash!" said the head falconer.

"I did not dismount, my friend. A passing traveller picked it up for me, and Diamond came to my wrist at my call. Enough, sirs, for to-day; we are far from the palace, and the sun grows hot, even though my umbrella is over me. Take Diamond from me, one of ye, he is too heavy for my arm now that the chase is past."

CHAPTER II.

A RETROSPECT.

AS the Queen rejoined her party she rode on in silence, musingly. "They told me," she thought to herself, "I should never see the boy again; that he lay wounded and dying in a distant fortress; and there were many who wished, doubtless, in their hearts that he had died—many to whom news of his death would have been welcome, to prevent strife. Yet, would that have prevented it? Alas! how many times hath it sprung out of trifles! How often the streets of my city have been red with the blood of my own people! And now, again, these scenes may be renewed if this poor fluttering heart be not firm! Ever since his dying mother put him, a babe, into my arms, and said he was my son—ever since his father, wounded to death, gave his hands into mine, and asked me—for the sake of the blood shed for me—that I would be a mother to him, have I not been so? Brought him up with the King, as his foster-brother; borne with all his waywardness and rashness, and yet loved to hear of his gallant deeds, and his devotion, and his honour? And now am I to believe that he is an assassin and a coward? that he slew Elias Khan treacherously, and

abandoned his people to destruction without striking a blow in their behalf? No! His face is as fair and open as ever. His eyes could not have met mine so frankly had they been those of a coward and traitor; and I must hear from his own lips all the particulars of what has occurred ere I can make any decision. I should not fear were the King present; but he is far away, and some time must elapse ere he returns. Yet why should I fear? Greater crises have passed over me than this; and the just Alla will help me to avert strife, as He has done before. My boy will come to me to-morrow. He shall attend the durbar, and in that he will hold himself, as he ever doth and ever will, as a true and brave man should. I will caution him to speak the truth fully, yet not so as to give offence, and among soldiers who hear him that will carry greater weight than my poor words. So, O beating heart, fear not, for the Lord is just, and thus I trust, though I am but a weak woman."

The little colloquy with herself seemed to have revived the Queen's confidence; her joyous spirits returned, and, as was usual with her, she chatted gaily with those around her; and the field duty being concluded, many of the leaders of both Abyssinians and Dekhanies joined the cavalcade which preceded and followed her to the Royal palace.

I think, however, that it would be interesting to my readers to know something of the real antecedents of this Royal lady; and

without attempting history, which would be out of place, I may be able to review some of the events of her life briefly, yet with sufficient distinctness to furnish materials from which her character may be judged, at least, in some respects. The Mussulman historian, Mahomed Kasim Ferishta, is fond of the character of Queen Chand, and very simply, yet on every appropriate occasion, holds it up to admiration. Yet this is little in comparison with the traditional knowledge of the Queen which lives still among the people of Beejapoor and Ahmednugger, and displays the popular affection for the Royal lady in a manner at once affecting and sincere.

Chand Sooltana was the daughter of Hoossein Nizam Shah, the King of Ahmednugger; and at the period at which the crusade against the Hindoo Prince of Beejanugger was determined on, the alliance of Beejapoor and Ahmednugger was cemented by a double marriage. Ally Adil Shah of Beejapoor gave his sister to become the bride of Moortuza, the Prince Royal of Ahmednugger, while he took the beautiful daughter of the King of Ahmednugger to be his own bride. The great battle which decided the supremacy of Hindoo or Moslim in Southern India was fought on the right bank of the Krishna river in 1563, with immense loss on both sides; but the powerful artillery of Ahmednugger, equipped and used in the field under European system, mainly contributed to the victory which the cavalry of Beejapoor secured. On former

occasions there had been alliances by marriage between these Royal houses which had had good effect in preventing those jealousies and wars which had been but too common ; and on this occasion the result was no less beneficial.

After the war was over, the Royal pair betook themselves to the settlement and pacification of the new provinces which, under the terms of partition, had fallen to the lot of Beejapoor. These had been ruled over by petty Hindoo barons and chieftains, who held these possessions in feudal tenure, and had always been noted for turbulence and disorder. They belonged, indeed, for the most part to the clans of Beydurs who had held them for ages, and acknowledged the rule of no power, Hindoo or Moslim, except when they were too weak to resist. In this delicate work the Queen took a very active and most beneficial part. She visited the Hindoo Princesses, was their advocate with the King, and gradually brought them to yield to love and consideration what they would never have yielded to threats or violence. Gradually, too, the King's authority was established over all the new territory, and though the work occupied some years, it was complete. All this time the Royal lady was her husband's constant companion. She was not secluded, and rode with him as he marched or hunted, without a formal veil, though in deference to custom her face was always slightly concealed. She was never absent from him in case of any resistance or skirmish, and she became as familiar with war as he was him-

self. All this time, however, her education proceeded. She became skilled in Persian and Arabic, and spoke Turkish, Toorki, and the dialects current in the army with ease and fluency, as well as Canarese and Mahratta, which were the vernacular languages of Beejapoor and Ahmednugger. And she had many other accomplishments. She drew and painted flowers with great delicacy; she played upon the vina with skill, and sang with a delightful voice many Persian ghuzals, and the pathetic Hindoo ballads of her own native tongue. But, alas! she had no children.

Ally Adil Shah, her beloved husband, died in 1580, or sixteen years after her marriage. At this period she must have been twenty-five years old, or thereabouts. The King left no male heir, but by his will appointed his nephew Ibrahim, son of his brother Thamash, to succeed him, and the Queen Dowager as his guardian and Regent of the Beejapoor kingdom, then, except the Moghul Empire of Dehly, the largest Mussulman power in India; and thus the Queen's independent political life began. Heretofore she appears to have led a joyous and peaceful existence, without care. Her husband, though of a warlike disposition, fostered trade, literature, and arts of peace; and after the destruction of the Hindoo power he became at liberty to prosecute those great works for the defence and adornment of his capital which still remain as monuments of his enlightened liberality. By him the city was surrounded

by a superb wall of stone and a broad deep ditch. The Jooma Mosque, which held six thousand persons at prayer, was begun and completed. The whole of the city was supplied with water, the pipes of which were laid through every street. A magnificent reservoir, called the Houz-î-Shahpoor, was excavated and surrounded with apartments and cloisters for merchants and travellers. In all these works, including the King's mausoleum, which, however, was never completed, the Queen, according to the traditions and contemporary records of Beejapoor, took an active part, and was the King's constant companion in directing them. She was his chief almoner also, and her charity and sympathy for the poor were unbounded. In all this love and confidence she had no rival; the King had no other wife, nor yet a mistress.

There is a portrait of the Queen still, I hope, in existence at Beejapoor, taken before her husband's death by some Persian artist at the Court. It is a profile, exquisitely painted in body colour, with none of the stiffness which usually accompanies Oriental pictures. The features are regular and very beautiful; the eyes large, of a soft brown, with long dark eyelashes, the eyebrows arched. The mouth is very sweet and gentle in expression, and bears a slight smile; but there is a decided tone of firmness about the full round chin and graceful throat; and the forehead, though not high, has a breadth and power which must have been very

remarkable. Altogether the Queen's is one of those faces which, once seen, is never forgotten; and the complexion is fair, with a faint tinge of carnation through the cheeks, which makes it almost European. Could Titian but have painted the face, it would have been one of the most perfect and interesting in the world. Her acknowledged beauty, her talent, and her sweet disposition, rendered her a popular favourite, and though local parties at Beejapoor were often seriously divided, all accepted her regency with enthusiasm.

Kamil Khan, a nobleman at the head of the Dekhany party, who had been employed as Executive Minister by her husband, was confirmed in that capacity by the Queen Dowager, while she herself superintended the education of the young King as her especial duty. Every day, except Wednesday and Friday, he was seated on the throne to hear the transactions of public business, accompanied by the Queen, who sat veiled immediately behind him; and for a time Kamil Khan behaved with every apparent respect and fidelity, but the man was base and treacherous at heart. His constant endeavour was to sow dissension between the Queen and her nephew; and his ill-usage of the people and general unpopularity reached such a pitch that the Queen, finding remonstrance of no avail, determined to remove him from office.

Kishwar Khan, a friend of her late husband, and whose character was hitherto above suspicion, was invited to Court,

and on his arrival in the citadel with a small retinue, Kamil Khan, who had no friends, fled to the outer wall, leaped into the ditch, swam across it, and eventually passed the outer wall of the city by letting himself down by his turban. He was pursued, however, and overtaken in his flight towards Ahmednugger, and perished in a vain attempt to resist the parties sent to apprehend him. But it was a rare thing in those times to find any Minister of a native kingdom true to his duty and his faith. Submissive, and apparently faithful for a time, Kishwar Khan was unable to escape the temptation to which his office exposed him. He became, according to the history of the time, haughty and insolent, not only to the Queen, but to the nobles and officers of State, and she was strongly advised by many to dismiss him. It had been well had she done so at once. She had resolved to appoint Syed Moostafa Khan, Governor of Bunkapoor, to the office, but her desire was frustrated by a horrible and base act of treachery. An order under the Royal seal was secretly written by Kishwar Khan, and despatched to Bunkapoor to a confederate, who, in concert with the officers of the garrison, and believing the purport of the Royal order to be true, put the unfortunate nobleman to death.

The Queen's grief and anger at this infamous transaction, which had resulted in the death, under her own supposed order, of one of her oldest and most valued friends, knew no bounds; but

she was helpless before the power of the Minister who held sway over the Dekhany portion of the army and the civil administration, and began to propagate rumours that the Queen was secretly instigating her brother, Moortuza Nizam Shah, now King of Ahmednugger, to invade the territories of Beejapoor, and even to annex the kingdom to his own. Pretending the utmost consternation on the subject, and fidelity to the young King, he rushed with disordered clothes into his presence, and demanded for the safety of the throne either that the traitorous Ahmednugger Princess should be put to death, or confined for life in a distant fortress. The young King bravely preserved his aunt's life, which was in imminent danger, at the hazard of his own; but he could do no more, and under acts of the most studied and offensive insult, Queen Chand was forced out of the harem, and publicly carried off to the hill fort of Sattara, one hundred and twenty miles distant.

The Minister had, however, only increased the love and sympathy of the people of the capital for their beloved mistress. He endeavoured to regain popularity by a splendid entertainment to the King; but as he rode in the Royal cavalcade through the streets he was hooted by the women, dust and ashes thrown upon him, and he was reviled as the oppressor of the Queen and the murderer of Moostafa Khan. On such occasions of violent popular excitement in the East, there is seldom time or opportunity for

flight, and the Queen's partisans were not idle. Advantage had been taken of the absence of the largest portion of the army on the northern frontier to force her from the city; but these troops were now hurrying back to Beejapoor, and the very day before their arrival, Kishwar Khan took the King to one of the Royal gardens, not, as was believed by most, with the intention of putting him to death and usurping the crown; but, as is perhaps more probable, of concealing his own flight, for, leaving the King in the gardens, he fled at once towards Ahmednugger. He arrived there, but was refused shelter, and proceeding to Golconda, was slain by one of the relatives of Moostafa Khan, in revenge for his kinsman's death.

Delivered from Kishwar Khan, the young King at once sent for his aunt, and her office of Regent was resumed. The new Minister, Ekhlas Khan, was an Abyssinian, but, like all his tribe, violent and uncontrollable, and the factious dissensions which ensued between Dekhanians and Abyssinians, which led to bloody contests in the streets, encouraged the invasion of the kingdom by the Kings of Berar, Beedu, and Golconda, and the close investment of the city followed at a time when there were not two thousand troops for its defence. Ekhlas Khan, though turbulent as a Minister, was, however, a brave and faithful soldier, and the city was well defended. The Queen, accompanied by her nephew the King, went from post to post at night, though the weather was the

severest of the rainy season, cheering, encouraging, and directing all. Two divisions of cavalry without the walls did good service in cutting off supplies and forage from the enemy and harassing their flanks; but at last twenty yards of the city wall fell down after a night of heavy rain, and an assault was imminent, but, owing to dissensions in the enemy's camp, did not take place. Meanwhile the Queen, taking advantage of the respite, not only guarded the breach in person, but collected the masons of the city, and setting the example herself, and freely distributing rewards, had the breach completed in time to prevent any chance of attack by storm. She had never left the spot by day or night, and all entreaties for her to spare herself from the inclement weather and take rest were unavailing.

The sore straits to which the kingdom had been reduced by the violence and obstinacy of the Abyssinian party now struck them so forcibly, that their leaders went in a body to the Queen and laid down their authority, beseeching her to do what she pleased with them so long as she and the King were safe. The Queen received this evidently earnest submission in a generous spirit. A new Minister, who possessed the confidence of all, was appointed, and in less than a month an army of twenty thousand of the old troops had collected at the capital. The Queen's devotion and spirited personal valour had inspired confidence in all, which now amounted to positive enthusiasm. The city had been invested for

more than a year, its weak garrison was often mutinous and despairing, a large breach had occurred in the works, and without them anarchy prevailed throughout the whole kingdom. Yet this noble woman had redeemed all by her personal example, and the siege was raised, the several allies retiring to their own dominions. And now the Queen hoped for peace.

Alas! it was not to be yet. Dilawar Khan, one of the military commanders, attacked the Minister, and blinded him, usurping the Executive power. Many other atrocities were committed, and again the Queen's authority was reduced to the mere control of the palace and education of the King. But, in spite of many cruelties, Dilawar Khan was an able administrator; the resources of the kingdom were again developed, its Government began to be respected, and no more attacks were made upon its possessions. The events I have detailed were crowded into the space of four years, and as the King was approaching the age at which his majority could be declared, the Queen hoped that with it the rest and peace she so intensely longed for would come to her. But there was still more to be done.

Not at Beejapoor, but in her native city, Ahmednugger. The King Moortuza asked for the hand of Khodeija Sooltana, the sister of his ward the King, for his son the Prince Hoosein, and considering that all trouble at Beejapoor was at an end, the Queen Chand accompanied the bride elect, the Royal party being escorted

by the choicest of the Ahmednugger cavalry. She had hoped to find peace in her old home; but she found that home more convulsed with faction, and more distracted within and without, than when she had left it. Her brother, Moortuza, always violent, had become in reality mad, and had attempted the life of his son Meerass, who, in revenge, attacked his father in the palace at Ahmednugger, and caused him to be suffocated in a hot bath. An account of this revolution is given minutely by the historian Ferishta, who was in command of the palace guards, and which is very dramatic in its details, but too long for extract. He does not, however, mention the Queen Chand, who must have been in the fort at the time of the tragedy. The new King did not long survive this act of parricide, and, after a few months, was seized by his Minister and publicly beheaded amidst the execrations of the people. After his death a frightful tumult arose: the fort was carried by the mob, and hundreds of persons of distinction, chiefly foreigners, perished. A period of anarchy then ensued, when Ismail, a son of Boorhan, who was brother of Moortuza Nizam Shah, and, therefore, nephew of Queen Chand, was declared King; and Jumal Khan, head of the Dekhany party, constituted himself Regent and Minister. This revolution was opposed by Beejapoor and Berar, and the troops of the latter were defeated by Jumal Khan; but peace was concluded with Beejapoor, and Queen Chand, wearied by constant strife and atrocities which she had no power to control, was allowed to

join the Beejapoor army then in the field, and returned with it, though with no authority, to the capital, there, as she trusted, to end her days in peace. She was received by the people with their former enthusiasm, and by the young King with no diminution of his old affection; but she took no part in public affairs, which, under the young King, were very prosperous. At Ahmednugger other revolutions followed with which this tale has no concern. Ismail, who had succeeded, was, after some time, attacked by his father, Boorhan, who had obtained the aid and sympathy of Akbar, Emperor of Dehly, and was deposed, and Boorhan himself reigned till his death in 1594 in comparative peace. He was succeeded by his son Ibrahim, a weak, violent prince, and the fortunes of the kingdom will be understood from the course of the present story to its close. At Beejapoor Queen Chand lived in peace, and only assumed local authority at the request of her nephew whenever his temporary absence was necessary in tours of his dominions or in the field.

Such were the real antecedents of our "noble Queen." I trust they may not be considered out of place in a work professedly of fiction, but tend to make more intelligible that which would be otherwise, perhaps, strange and confused. Few in England know that the contemporary of our Queen Elizabeth in the Dekhan kingdoms was a woman of equal ability, of equal political talent, of equal, though in a different sense, education and accomplishments,

who ruled over a realm as large, a population as large, and as intelligent, and as rich as England; a woman who, surrounded by jealous enemies, preserved by her own personal valour and endurance her kingdom from destruction and partition; who, through all temptations and exercise of absolute power, was at once simple, generous, frank, and merciful as she was chaste, virtuous, religious, and charitable—one who, among all the women of India, stands out as a jewel without flaw and beyond price.

CHAPTER III.

THE EVENTS OF A DAY.

ABBAS KHAN had no intention of disregarding the Queen's directions to avoid the body of Abyssinian cavalry which he would have met if he had gone by Torwéh and the main streets of the city. It would have been pleasant, no doubt, to have exchanged greetings with old friends of all kinds, merchants and others, who lived in the great thoroughfare; and at one time he had thought of lodging the priest and his sister with a certain Armenian banker and jewel merchant who was well known to him; but the priest had expressed some doubt as to consorting with the Armenians, who were, as he explained, heretics in faith, and chances of disagreement were better avoided in a strange place. "No matter how humble they may be, we should prefer our own people. I have heard they are numerous in the city, in the service of the King, and have no spiritual guide among them," said the priest; and they rode on together.

Musing on his own affairs, and arranging in his mind how he should lay the whole best before his Royal mistress, Abbas Khan rode slowly on towards the city. Passing through the great

cemetery known as the Roza, or Garden, in which the mausoleum and mosque of the reigning King were then in course of erection, and entering by the south-eastern gate, he had completely avoided the outer portion of the city, and was on the direct road past the citadel, to his uncle Humeed Khan's house, which lay to the north-west side of it, not far from the stupendous mausoleum of Mahmood Adil Shah, commonly known as the Gól Goomaz. This was, if we may call it so, the most aristocratic quarter of the fort. Here were the mansions of Ankoos Khan, of the Nawab Mustafa Khan, of Khawar Khan, and a host of other noblemen, all surrounded by pleasant gardens and courtyards, according to their pretensions. That of Humeed Khan was by no means one of the largest, but it was a substantial, comfortable residence, and its well laid-out garden was perhaps superior to most others in its vicinity.

Abbas Khan had sent on his own baggage and the priest's overnight, with a note to his aunt to announce his arrival; he was met, therefore, at the gate by his trusty steward and a crowd of retainers, and by several of the chief women servants, who, with trays containing mustard seed, flowers, spices, and small lighted lamps, waved them over his head, with cries of welcome; and bidding the steward see to the comfort of the priest and his sister, Abbas Khan passed on into the inner court of the Zenana, where his aunt, with her chief attendants, was ready to receive him.

And it was a warm welcome that the Lady Fatima accorded to her long absent nephew. She stroked his face fondly, and passed her hands over his person from head to foot, kissing the tips of her fingers; and at last, fairly casting ceremony aside, took him in her arms and embraced him heartily, holding him from her from time to time as if to assure herself that he was in very truth her own son. Fatima Khanum had, however, no real son; one had been born years ago who had died young; her two daughters were married, and with their husbands in different parts of the country, and the good lady had adopted Abbas, the son of her husband's late brother, as her son; and the boy had grown up before her, the foster-brother of the King so long as his age permitted of his living at the Royal palace, and afterwards with herself, until the service of war and of the State called him into active life, since when she had seen him rarely, and till the present occasion it was months since he had been near enough to ride home to see her.

"Yes, thou art the same Meeah," she said, as the tears coursed down her face, and an occasional sob of joy broke from her; "the same, only stronger and more manly. But take off thy heavy mail and morion, and sit here by me till thy bath is ready, and tell me all thy adventures. Nay!" she continued, as he was about to seat himself on his cushions, "not a word will I hear till thou hast bathed and eaten. I have provided for thy friends in the garden pavilion, where they will be quite private, and more at their ease

than among us. Now away, and return as soon as thou canst, when thou art refreshed."

The return to his old luxuries was by no means unacceptable to the young man. The delicious bath, the offices of the eunuchs in attending him, and their skilful manipulations; the absence of his heavy mail shirt, greaves, and gauntlets, and the light fresh clothes ready for him, gave him a sense of relief such as he had not enjoyed since he left home months ago. Since then he had had unremitting active service in the field, and was, indeed, never at rest even for a day; for alarms were constant, skirmishes with rebel parties frequent, and anxiety always present that he might be outwitted or overwhelmed by superior forces. Nor was he quite easy about his men. Except ten retainers, all the household troops were with his uncle, and the rest of those under his command were at best uncertain, and often, indeed, insubordinate and mutinous.

For before the plans of Eyn-ool-Moolk were developed, the Beejapoor soldiery in the western part of the kingdom were much divided in opinion as to whether it would be most profitable to join the Prince Ismail's party, and to obtain the rewards in money, rank, and estates that were so freely promised; or to hold to their own old position in the State army, and be faithful. Abbas Khan's situation, then, had been a trying one in many ways; but it was one he had sought himself, and through all risk or positive danger he was determined to do his duty. His stern uncle would accept

nothing less in any case, and under any failure would, he knew, cast him off for ever. Part of this we have explained before, but it is necessary that his position should be entirely known to account for its peculiar interest.

I need not recapitulate the events which had occurred, and which, now refreshed by his bath and breakfast, and with his aunt's own hookah specially provided for him, Abbas Khan related with animation. His wound was long since healed, but the discoloration of the cicatrix showed clearly through the thin muslin tunic he wore, and the history of it was none the less interesting that it could be seen and felt. The Lady Fatima sat in an ecstasy, now weeping, now flushing with anger, fascinated by the detail as it flowed with an eloquence and power which were new to her; but when her nephew pressed her to tell him what account had been given of him by those who had returned and by general rumour, she was silent.

"I was sent for yesterday," she said, "by the Queen, who ordered me to tell you nothing. She expects you to-night, and purposes to tell you all herself; and you must bear me witness, by the love you have for me and her, that I have told you nothing. I sent a messenger to inform her that you had arrived, but she is still at Torwéh, and will not return till after the afternoon prayer, and you will not hear till then. Meanwhile many will come to see

you, and you may hear something, but believe nothing till you hear it from the Queen herself."

"And why this mystery?" asked the young man; "why do thine eyes fill with tears? Danger is too familiar to me to dread it, and I know of no enemies but the faction of Elias Khan; what have I to fear from that?"

"I cannot tell thee, my son," said the worthy lady, her eyes at last fairly overflowing, "I cannot tell thee; danger I fear not for thee, but for thy honour and the fame of a noble house I do fear. Do not ask me more; when the Queen tells all to thee thou wilt know how to act. Now go forth into the audience hall, and sit there. Many have come to see thee, and may tell thee somewhat of the common gossip; but the opinions of an old woman like me are little worth, and I have said already that I am under promise to tell thee nothing. She, the Queen-mother, loves thee, Meeah, and she is wise beyond the wisdom of men. Now go, and forget what I have said."

We do not suppose that Abbas Khan's mind was much assured by this mystery. Arrival at home, after a long and painful absence, is a time to look for sympathy and for a joyous welcome; yet, after his aunt's loving reception, there ensued a painful reticence which was entirely unexpected, and foreboded something intensely disagreeable, if not positively dangerous. But this depression did not last long, and gloomy thoughts disappeared

before the pleasant gossip of the crowd of visitors who poured in as the day drew on. How much he had to hear of old companions, of their fortunes and misfortunes, of political events, and the progress of public affairs! He expected, perhaps, some allusion to his own proceedings; but, beyond congratulation on his recovery from his wound, nothing was said of any moment, or that could excite the smallest suspicion; and, so far, he was assured. The Queen would return from Torwéh in the evening, and had convened a full Court for to-morrow, in which some business of importance was to be transacted, but what it was had not transpired.

So after his visitors had departed, Abbas went into the small mosque for the afternoon prayer; and this finished, he strolled into the garden, where the priest and his sister awaited him with profuse thanks at the comforts he had bestowed upon them, and the kind hospitality of his aunt.

"Maria has been with her a long time," said her brother, "and she presses us to stay; but we feel that Christians residing in a Moslim's house would be out of place and inconvenient to you, and in this bigoted city might bring obloquy upon you. We have, therefore, made arrangements with the artist, Miguel de Furtado, whom you kindly sent to us, to lodge with him. And as, by order of the Queen, an empty mansion, which lies close to this garden, has been given him to reside in, we shall all be able to live

together in comfort. His wife, and sister, and children are with him; and among them and others, our countrymen, we shall live happily, so long as our presence is needed, and with your permission, noble Khan, we will remove there in the evening."

Indeed, it was an arrangement which suited every one. There was evidently truth in the good Padré's remark, that obloquy might attach itself to Abbas Khan's family if they entertained a Christian priest and his sister as guests. Miguel Furtado was a person much respected, and was then employed in the decoration of the chambers of the Asar Mahal, and was treated with much consideration. He had originally been a stenciller of ceilings and room panels in his native country, and had been engaged at Goa; but the Royal offers from Beejapoor were too attractive to be refused, and when decoration there became fashionable, he found ample employment and remuneration for his work in the palaces and private mansions of the city; and the paintings still to be seen in the Asar Mahal, though sorely faded and obliterated, are yet distinct enough to be easily followed.

The muezzins had barely proclaimed the evening call to prayer from the mosques around, including that in his own garden, when he was informed that one of the messengers of the Palace desired to see him; and, bidding his friends farewell for the present, Abbas Khan returned to the house, and in his own private apartment awaited the Queen's message. The Mirdha, or Court usher,

who delivered it, seemed as mysterious as everyone else. He looked right and left, then over his shoulder, to see if any one followed, made a profound obeisance, and, stooping down and covering his mouth with his scarf, whispered,—

"The Queen Mother desires to see you, my lord, about the first watch of the night, when the night council is over; but you are to come before that, and be in attendance in case you are wanted. Perhaps," added the man, "my lord had better come well armed, though not so as to excite suspicion, and with a few followers."

"I thank thee for thy caution, Meer Sahib," said the young Khan. "Surely thou wert ever careful of me, even when I was a wild boy; and now cares come on me, and warnings of danger which are not to be put aside heedlessly."

"Nay, God forbid there should be danger to my lord, and in presence of the asylum of the world," replied the man; "but precaution is needful in one who has enemies, and the passages of the Palace have not been safe on some occasions."

"Good!" returned the young man, "I will be careful. And the Queen is well?"

"She rode to-day, my lord, as she did when she was a girl with her husband of blessed memory, and brought back her hawk's quarry. Ay! and when she spoke of old times to us as we sat by her side, there were many eyes wet with tears. And what should we do here, my lord, with Dekhanies and Abyssinians ever ready

to fly at each other's throats, and duels in the streets as common as ordinary greetings, but for her?"

"Between Dekhanies and Abyssinians?" asked Abbas Khan.

"Nay, not so much, but among themselves; and the Dekhanies have been the worst by far. 'Twas only a few days ago that nine of them, Bhylmees and Siah Chuttrees, were lying dead and dying between the citadel and the great well; and one survived, who will be tried in the Adalut, and we hope beheaded for an example. The Queen has vowed to put an end to this shameless license. But I must depart, my lord. Fail not to come, and I will be ready at the entrance of the private audience room to await you."

"I will be there without fail, Meer Sahib, and will be cautious," was the reply. Abbas Khan saw at once that more than ordinary care was necessary. Before the Queen, indeed, there might be no danger; and yet even her presence or the King's was no safeguard against deeds of violence; but in the precincts of the palace, and especially at night, there was little security, save that which resulted from a man's own personal bravery and caution. As the time drew near, then, at which he must proceed to the palace, Abbas Khan dressed himself with unusual care, selecting a very light but extremely flexible shirt of Italian chain mail of exquisite temper, completely dagger proof, which he could wear under his ordinary costume without chance of notice, and the lightly-quilted

yellow satin tunic, indeed, completely concealed it. Into the folds of his turban also he twisted a chain of steel links, which could not be noticed, and which protected his head. Thus secure in his person, a light sabre usually worn at Court completed his equipment; and a rich brocaded muslin scarf tied round his waist, and a handsome Cashmere shawl over his shoulders, formed a costume appropriate to his first visit to his Royal mistress. From the house guard of spearmen he took six, and his trusty standard-bearer, Yasin Khan, with four others of the household cavalry, composed his escort. He had inquired about the men who had been with him in the skirmish, but only a few had returned home, reporting him dead, and had been sent on to his uncle with other drafts for the main army, which was still in the field. Of the rest he could hear nothing, but he trusted to discover them as time wore on; though it was only too probable they had joined the rebel forces of Eyn-ool-Moolk and the young Prince.

From his house to the main gate of the citadel was only a short distance; and though it was dark, the light from his two torches borne before him was ample. As he entered the citadel by the bridge over the ditch, the gloomy, narrow passage and traverses were lighted up by the torches, though the dark battlements above seemed to frown upon him as he passed under the lofty archway of the gate. Within, the officers of the guard, whom he knew, greeted him kindly and with a hearty welcome; and he passed the

deserted Hindoo college and the streets which led up to the Palace itself, meeting crowds of accountants and officials of all degrees on their way home after the labours of the day. Not far beyond the gate of the Royal treasury the old messenger who had brought the Queen's order advanced to direct him, and informed him that the Queen was in her private audience chamber with some of the Executive Ministers, and that he was to wait in the ante-chamber till he should be called; and bidding the groom in charge walk his horse about till he should require it, and his escort to keep together, Abbas Khan dismounted, and entered the door which led to the Queen's apartments.

He was in no humour to converse, though the loquacious old Mirdha, and others of his acquaintance, crowded around him with humble greetings. Strive as he would, Abbas Khan felt as if he were approaching some crisis in his life which he could not avert, and to which—even though it might be death—he must, as a true Moslim and soldier of the State, submit without question. Several of the Ministerial officers passed out as he sat: the Peshkar, or Hindoo Ministers of Revenue and Finance, with their bundles of papers tied up in coarse red cloth; the head judges, civil and criminal; the Superintendent of Public Works, and the Kótwal, or head of the police of the city, with his deputies; the Secretary of Correspondence, and others—the whole representing an immense

mass of public business of many kinds. But every night, ere she slept, the Royal lady had heard and passed her orders upon all, and signed the documents and warrants presented to her. It was some labour for a woman, mentally as well as physically, for during the whole of every day, from early morning till the afternoon, with but little intermission, the current business of the State was constantly before the Queen. No accounts were kept more accurately than those of the State as to its revenues; and though there might be laxity in some respects if contrasted with a modern standard, yet in the main it was systematio and regular, and the old revenue settlements of Beejapoor often met with in the country are more minute and more practically useful than can easily be credited.

Abbas Khan had not to wait long before the first watch of the night had sounded from the gongs of the citadel; the curtain of the Royal chamber was drawn aside by the eunuch in waiting, and he was directed to enter into "the presence." All the Ministerial officers had withdrawn, but the blind and venerable Ekhlas Khan, Hyat Khan, the head Kotwal of the city, who had first denounced Eyn-ool-Moolk's conspiracy, and had rendered service during the short rebellion, and Kureen-oo-dein Chishtee, the head of the orthodox religious party in Beejapoor, who was the Queen's spiritual adviser as well as the King's, and might be termed keeper of the Royal conscience—a man from his calling and position

bigoted, but in the main just and reasonable as he was eminently charitable and benevolent. All these persons were seated near the cushion which formed the throne, and seemed to be in earnest conversation with the Queen as Abbas Khan entered, and with the necessary respectful salutation kissed the foot of the throne thrice, and, presenting the hilt of his sword to his Royal mistress, stood before her in an attitude of humble expectancy, as the Queen, with a gracious smile, bade him welcome.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EVENTS OF A DAY.—*Continued.*

THE Queen was seated in her usual place in the beautiful room which Abbas Khan had known from his childhood, and where for years he had been the fellow-student and joyous playmate of the King. She was dressed in her usual Court costume, a white muslin robe of the Persian fashion, with a filmy white muslin scarf over her head, lightly edged with gold tissue ribbon, which, passing over her head, hung down over her right arm. She was not unveiled entirely, but the almost transparent muslin, of which the covering of her face was composed, allowed her features to be distinctly visible to those who sat near her. They seemed to the young man even softer and more tenderly beautiful than they had appeared in her hunting dress; and though he had been long absent, he did not observe any change, for she was to him, in his intense love and admiration for his foster-mother, the most beautiful woman, in his eyes, that he had ever seen. There was no alteration in the Royal seat, in the room whose clustered shafts, rising from the corners and sides in slender columns of the whitest polished stucco, looked like marble, and spread out into the bewildering tracery of the

roof, while the spaces between the shafts were covered with the most delicate arabesque patterns, portions of which shone with burnished gold. There was no perceptible change in those who sat before him; was the difference then in himself, that all, except the Queen herself, appeared to regard him with suspicion?

"Be seated, Abbas Khan," said the Queen, in her soft, low voice. And with a courteous reverence to each of those present, which he was now at liberty to make, and which was kindly returned, the young Khan took his seat below the rest.

"Thou hast none but elders and friends to listen to thee," continued the Queen; "friends of thy father and uncle; tell them and me in what manner Elias Khan was slain, and why thou took refuge in Juldroog."

"If I might hear any accusation there is against me first, I might reply the better," answered Abbas Khan. "Nevertheless, if this be withheld from me, I am not ashamed to tell my Queen and mother, and my elders, the truth, as the Lord knoweth."

"Conceal nothing, my son," said the Queen, gently. "Even if thou hast chanced to err, speak freely and truly."

"Ye all know," he continued, addressing Hyat Khan, the chief Kotwal, "how Elias Khan was surprised by our lord the King, and how, as he did to Eyn-ool-Moolk, in the generosity of his heart, Elias was released. Ye all know, too, how he fled to Eyn-ool-

Moolk and the Prince Ismail. Then he became a declared rebel."

We need not, perhaps, follow the young Khan's narrative of the skirmish in which Elias Khan was slain by him, nor the subsequent events which have already been detailed; nor how he declared he had been sick unto death, while he was living with his cousin, Osman Beg, till relieved by a holy Dervish, and afterwards a Portuguese padré, who had been sent to Juldroog by Dilawer Khan, of Moodgul, and whom he had brought with him under the order of the Queen herself. The young man's narrative was clear and distinct, and the frank manner in which it was given carried with it conviction of its truth to all who heard it.

"Yet," said Hyat Khan, "it was believed, it is believed, that thou wert the traitor, and slew Elias Khan treacherously, because he was thy rival."

"And," added the priest, with a scornful sniff, "that thou hast been consorting with the Nazarene woman, who is a reputed witch and sorceress."

Abbas Khan looked from one to another of the speakers, by turns, with amazement, his fair face flushing with excitement. "Who are my accusers?" he asked. "I can reply only to them on these points, and I pray the Royal justice that I may be confronted with them, and then let Alla judge. As to the Christian lady, let my Queen-mother examine herself; to me she is as a

mother or a sister—a holy woman devoted to the service of God by her vows, as her brother is by his."

"As-tagh-fur-oolla! may God forbid!" exclaimed the priest, contemptuously; "as if a Nazarene infidel could devote herself to God! Touba! Toubā!"

"While she was in Juldroog," retorted Abbas Khan, with some bitterness, "she was the guest of the holy Syud and his granddaughter, who lived below the fort, while I, weak as I was, resided on the top of the mountain, with my cousin. Till she had been sent for and welcomed by my aunt, the Lady Fatima, I had never seen her face, for she was always closely veiled."

"And she is in thy house still," cried the priest, with a sneer.

"Not so, holy father," was the quiet reply; "as soon as accommodation could be provided for them they went to the house of Miguel Furtado, the painter; and they are there now, waiting the Queen's pleasure."

"They say, too," said Ekhlas Khan, "that thou left thy people to be slain by rebels, and fled like a coward!"

"A coward! Nay, there are few living who dare use that word before me; but I respect their age and infirmity, noble Khan, and am silent. Nay, think; had I been a coward could I have slain Elias Khan? He was no puny antagonist; and could I have borne the wound I bear here," and he pointed to his breast, "had I been a coward?"

"Did he speak to thee?" asked Hyat Khan.

"He cursed me as he struck at me," replied Abbas Khan. "And it was a fair blow, sirs, as one would give in fight to another; but he spoke no more, for I clove him to the breast, and he fell dead from his horse. For many days I could not sleep, for he seemed ever present, with his dying look of hate; but the Syud Dervish gave me an exorcism which I wear, and that has delivered me from him. I have yet ceremonies to perform, as I vowed, at thy holy shrine, Huzrut," he continued to the priest, "and I will not delay them."

"An exorcism!" exclaimed the priest, "and from a poor Dervish; may I see it?"

"It hath never seen the light since he gave it to me, Huzrut," said the young man, respectfully; "but one so reverend and so learned as thou art may see it," and he unloosed it from a cord by which it was suspended round his neck. The paper was enclosed in a thin sheet of silver, which was easily opened, and the priest looked at the diagram and figures with wonder and admiration.

"No novice hath written this, but the writing is that of age. Happy is the possessor of it, for unto him can come no evil of man's device," said the priest, reverently placing the paper to his lips, his forehead, and his breast. "And a Dervish wrote it? Who is he, living in so lonely a place unknown?"

"He told me who he was, Huzrut, and I have no concealment to make. He is a State prisoner since the time of the first King, Ibrahim, by whom he was blinded, and has lived ——"

"Protection of God!" interrupted the priest and Ekhlas Khan, in a breath. "Can it be the learned Syud Ahmed Ali, the physician?"

"Even so," replied Abbas Khan. "I was to speak of him to the Queen, and interest her in his fate; and I do so, most gracious mother, now;" and the young man rose, kissed the foot of the throne, and stood with his hand folded in an attitude of supplication.

"He is forgiven," she said, firmly, "since, under the help of Alla, he saved thee, my son. There will be many who remember him."

"Yes, many," said Ekhlas Khan. "I am one of his contemporaries who well remember how he was most trusted of all save the King, who, after he had banished the blind Syud, was never sane again."

"And he is blind, too, Abbas Khan! Merciful God! and hath passed forty years in that prison," said the Queen, from whose eyes tears of pity were stealing.

"Quite blind, mother; but he can write, as the priest has seen; and he hath a child, a granddaughter, who leads him about, as he doeth works of charity."

"We will send for them, Inshalla! to-morrow, and Osman Beg shall be directed to forward them with all honour. As far as can be, the sin of my house to him shall be redeemed. You will see to this, Hyat Khan?"

"Your orders are on my head and eyes," he returned, respectfully; "nothing shall be left undone. But will your Majesty, refuge of the world, pass orders on the Khan's case?"

"I see no order to pass, Hyat Khan," returned the Queen; "surely ye are satisfied?"

"We may be, but the people will not be," said the Kotwal, decidedly. "There is a blood feud now between the people of Elias Khan and Abbas Khan. Put thought of him aside, O noble lady, and prevent bloodshed, a renewal of the old scenes which brought the kingdom to the verge of ruin. There is a public durbar to-morrow, let the case be decided; I have force enough to prevent riot."

"I beg to represent," humbly said the fiery young Khan, who could hardly restrain himself as he bowed reverently before the throne, "let there be no doubt so far as I am concerned. I claim the ancient privilege of all accused persons, that, to clear my honour from stain, I shall be allowed the trial of ordeal. I am alone, except my poor stupid standard-bearer, Yasin. One follower, Jumal, died of his wounds at Narrainpoor, and one, Runga Naik, the Beydur, is far away in his own country; and as he is

Hindoo," he added, turning to the priest, "he might not be believed. I am alone before God, and to Him I commit myself. Do not hinder me, friends and elders; ye know I am right."

"No! no! no!" cried the Queen, stretching out her hands in turns to all around her; "let there be no duel, let not blood be shed. As ye love me, as ye love the King, let there be no duel; it will but increase the feud!"

"It cannot be avoided, lady," said the priest and Ekhlas Khan, speaking almost together. "This will be no brawling duel, but a solemn appeal to the All Just to decide the truth. It is a custom of the State which no one, not even the King himself, would dare to infringe. If I know his brave uncle's heart, he will be the first to rejoice that Abbas Khan offered of himself to undertake the risk."

"But," added Hyat Khan, "let there be no precipitancy, no previous challenge, which would cause new irritation. Let the issue rest upon the events of the durbar to-morrow, when, though rough words may be spoken, there can be no violence, and even the need may pass away. In any case, there is the sanctuary of the Ark if the Khan claims it.

"God forbid I should do so!" returned Abbas Khan. "The sanctuary is but for cowards, who have doubtful hearts; whatever be my fate, it is the judgment of the Lord, and I have faced it too often to fear. Mother! my noble Queen, be just, and deny not to me what is the privilege of all, even the meanest."

"Thou art weak, Abbas Khan," she said; "thy wound is still tender."

"It would take little to prove to thee that I am strong enough, mother," he said, with a smile; and, advancing to the foot of the throne, he took up both the heavy silver lampstands and held them out at arms length without trembling.

"Well done! well done! 'tis the feat of an athlete," cried the priest. "With a strong arm and that holy amulet he is safe, O lady; let it be as he wishes."

"Put your hand on my head, my noble mother," said Abbas Khan, "and fear not. Give me thy blessing as thou didst the first time I went into the field; and if I live, believe me true and honest; if I die, rejoice that Alla hath so dealt with one faithless and a coward. Mother, may I come near?"

"Come," she said, though she was weeping. "Chand Beebee commits thee to God;" and as he knelt down and put his head into her lap, she laid her hands solemnly upon it, and her lips moved; but they who watched her saw she was too much affected to speak.

"And now, friends," she continued, after a while, and as Abbas Khan took his seat once more, "we thank ye for your aid to-night, for your aid and your direction, and ye have liberty to depart. Bring the pán and atar," she called to the eunuch without, and in a few moments all had received their dismissal, and rose to

depart, Abbas Khan giving the precedence to his elders, and assisting the blind Ekhlas Khan to descend the steps of the Royal chamber. Outside, in the street, were the palanquins and horses, with the attendants of the councillors; and one by one they departed, the priest saying as he took his seat in his litter, "Only satisfy me about the Christian woman, Abbas Khan, and I am your friend for ever. Alas! they are but too beautiful I hear."

"Let to-morrow pass, Huzrut," was the reply. "If I am spared thou shalt believe me true as my father, thy friend, was before me."

"Ameen!" said the holy man. "Ameen! may it be so."

For a minute or two Hyat Khan, who had a large retinue, stood conversing with the young Khan, suggesting that he should see him safely home. But this he gracefully declined, and Hyat Khan had put his horse in motion to give his companion room, and Abbas Khan's retinue had moved on into his place and awaited their master's coming. There was no one near Abbas Khan but his groom, who was holding the horse's head, and an attendant, who held out the stirrup for him to mount; his old friend the Mirdha and two or three of the eunuchs were looking on. Suddenly a man of tall and powerful frame appeared to leap from behind a buttress of the building, and exclaiming, "Elias sends you this!" struck at the young Khan with all his force. The blow was so powerfully dealt that his intended victim, helpless from his

position, staggered, and, as his horse plunged, fell to the ground. Many who saw the transaction thought he had been slain, and for an instant the assassin was in the grasp of several of the eunuchs and others, but he shook them off with ease, and fled into the dark recesses of the citadel, where concealment was easy, or whence he might leap from the wall and swim the ditch, and so escape into the city. A few men with torches followed him, but returned after a vain search.

Had it not been for the shirt of mail, Abbas Khan had never spoken more, for the assassin's dagger would have reached his heart. As it was, except feeling a severe bruise, the young man was unhurt; but the shock had caused his old wound to bleed in some degree, and the warm blood, trickling down his chest, warned him to obtain assistance as soon as possible, and the good Padré was close at hand. As he was about to mount his horse one of Hyat Khan's attendants, looking on the ground, had found the assassin's dagger, and it was at once recognised by all. The point had broken off with the force of the blow, and was found where Abbas Khan had stood. As Hyat Khan examined the weapon, he declared it to be that of Yacoot, the chief retainer of Elias Khan, and commander of his body guard, who was a native Abyssinian, and had brought the weapon from his own country.

"He cannot elude me," said the Kotwal to Abbas Khan.

"Ruffian as he is he hath long been notorious for his crimes and violence. But thou hast had a narrow escape, my friend, and mayest thank the Lord and thy good mail for thy life; but, hark! the Queen calls; go, I will wait for thee, and, ushered in by the eunuch, Abbas Khan was again in the Royal presence.

There was no formality now. The Queen stood in the centre of the hall, before the throne, with her arms outstretched. She had cast away her veil, and an agonised sob broke from her, while her slight frame still trembled with the horror she had endured when the first cry of "Abbas Khan is dead!" fell upon her ears.

"Thou art safe, Meeah!" she murmured, stretching out her hands, while he stooped and touched her feet; "tell me thou art safe!"

"I am unhurt, mother," he said, "though it was a fierce blow. I am always safe with thy blessing on my head; and see, is not that proved to-night? Inshalla! to-morrow will pass as safely, for I fear not, O my Queen! my heart is true and my cause just; but suffer me to depart, mother, for Hyat Khan is waiting for me."

"It is well," she replied, "else I should have ordered the Palace guard to escort thee home. Khoda Hafiz, may God have thee in his keeping! Ere morning breaks my thank-offerings will be at every shrine and mosque in the city."

"Thou wilt need to be well armed to-morrow," said Hyat Khan, as he parted from his young friend at the gate of Humeed Khan's

mansion. "Make no show of preparation, but, I say, be ready. But for this vile attempt on thy life, I had thought all might pass off quietly, but Yacoot will have his faction at his back, and he is not a temperate one. Sleep and rest, for the events of the day have been exciting, and so may the Lord keep thee!"

Abbas Khan did not disturb his aunt, but retired to his private apartment; sending word that he was tired and needed rest, and would see her in the morning; and he at once sent for his good friend the Padré, writing him a line to bring remedies, for his wound had broken out afresh. Meanwhile he used what precautions he knew, and before the priest arrived the bleeding had nearly ceased. Francis d'Almeida, and the household of his worthy host, had long been asleep, but as the Khan's note was brought to him, he took some strong adhesive plaister and other remedies, dressed himself, and went at once.

"Have I understood thy writing?" he said, as he entered the quiet chamber where the young man was reclining on his cushions, bathing his wound. "Ah! I have always feared this; the bandages were loosed too soon; but let me see. . . . . Ah, well, 'tis none so bad; only the old part which had been mismanaged. So lie down straight, and I will see what I can do."

"Thou art a good fellow," said the Khan, pressing his hand, "and I owe, next to life, the use of my arm to thee. I have been careless, and must take the consequences."

"Nay, there is more than carelessness here," said the priest, as

he examined his friend's body; "there is a bad bruise under the shoulder which has been the cause of this. Why dost thou conceal it?"

Then Abbas Khan told him of the blow he had received, and of the dagger having been recognised. "All will be settled to-morrow, Padré, and in the afternoon thou and Maria will be sent for by my noble Queen. Ah! yes, that is easy now, and I shall rest. It must not bleed again, Padré, for these are stirring times, and I may be needed for duty, perhaps—who knows?—ere to-morrow passes."

"I will come at the first watch of the day to-morrow, and see if the bandages hold well; till then, sleep if you can, Khan Sahib, for there are some nervous symptoms about thee which may hinder thy recovery if they continue. May God keep thee! Thou wilt not sleep the less soundly for a priest's blessing." "Let him sleep till he wakes of his own accord," he continued to the head eunuch of the chamber, "and do not wake him. I will be here ere the first watch close."

Abbas Khan slept soundly. All anxiety as to the future was past; his way was clear before him, and it must be death or life, as the Lord willed, which is the true solace and comfort of every devout Mussulman. In his dreams, too, once more came the memory of the Dervish and her who had watched over him that memorable night, and who again seemed to be near him as an angel of Paradise, and ministering to him tenderly.

CHAPTER V.

THE ORDEAL.

ABBAS KHAN slept soundly and refreshingly. As he woke long after his usual hour, his first action was to stretch his arms to the full, and he was gratified to find that the blow he had received had left no permanent pain or stiffness. The bandages put on by Francis d'Almeida were firm in their place, and the wound felt easy. He remembered that he was not to open them himself, or allow them to be meddled with; and on his attendant informing him that the worthy man had already arrived, he was desired to send him in, and keep out everyone else, and in a few moments the Padré entered.

"I trust you have slept well, my lord?" he asked, after the usual salutations had passed. "You did not suffer from the wound, or the blow upon your back?"

"I slept as a child sleeps, my friend," replied the young Khan; "never stirring, and with no pain; and had most delightful dreams. They appeared so real too, that when I woke I seemed to see sitting by my bedside, where thou art, the figure and the lovely face of her who had given me sherbet in my dream, as she did

during the first night I saw her, when the sun fever had stricken me down, and I was nigh unto death. It was a happy omen for the day, Señor Padré."

"May it be fortunate to you," said the Padré, smiling. "And she you thought of—pardon the liberty—was Zóra, the granddaughter of the old Dervish. Ah, poor Zóra! Maria, my sister, loves to speak of her, and loves her truly. You have not heard of her?"

"No," replied the Khan; "but I have not forgotten what I owe her and the old man. I spoke to the Queen about him last night, and a retinue will be sent for him as soon as it can be prepared. When I was at Juldroog he told me his history, and I found it confirmed at once by two of the Royal councillors—old men who knew him well. I will tell you of it another time; but Zóra may have told it to your sister?"

"No," returned the priest, "she cannot have known it, or she would surely have mentioned it. They were like elder and younger sisters; and there is not a night as we pray together that I do not ask the Virgin's blessing on her. Dear child! she used to speak much of thee, my lord, to my sister; and she was so beautiful."

"Of me!" cried the young man, eagerly; "of me! What did she say? What did she tell Maria?"

"Do not excite yourself, my lord," said the priest, gravely, as he now began to examine the dressing of the wound, "else I may

do hurt. When she arrives you may perhaps meet her. In truth, I know nothing. And I should have been more cautious in what I said," he continued, blushing. "Think not upon it, my lord."

"It is no use thinking of the girl, Padré Sahib, for it is not likely I may ever see her, and—but no matter. How do you find the wound?"

"Better than I expected," was the reply; "much better. My lord is in excellent health and strength. The muscular development is great," he continued, stroking down the powerful arms; "the livid appearance of the blow behind has gone. I will take off some of the upper bandages and replace them with lighter and easier ones, and my lord will be able to use his arm more freely. Forgive me the question, but was that blow from behind a stab? Nay, conceal it not from me."

"It was, Padré Sahib, a coward blow as I was mounting my horse; and but for a suit of Genoa mail I wore, I had perished."

"And your people apprehended the assassin?"

"No, he escaped in the darkness; but he had fallen and dropped the dagger, and that is witness against him."

"So he is known?"

"As far as his dagger is concerned he is, and is champion of the party of the man I slew, Elias Khan. To-day will decide the question, and all the nobility and officers of the durbar will be present. I would you could see the noble sight; but

you are unknown, and had better remain quiet, for it is impossible to say when the Queen may send for you and for Maria."

"In my country there might be an honourable appeal to arms in such a case," said the priest, musingly. "It is a savage custom, but one which satisfies many."

"We have the same here, Señor."

"I understand," replied the priest, the tears rising to his eyes, "and can be secret. If thou art wounded send for me. I will come instantly, and may save thee pain. Meanwhile all is safe and secure in regard to the wound; but the bandages may be strained, and if so, suffering will follow. Take my blessing, noble Khan," and the good priest, kneeling down by the Khan's bed, prayed fervently.

"I am grateful for thy affection and thy blessing," returned the Khan, deeply moved, "and will be careful; but do not mention this to Maria."

"Not even to Maria," he said; "and I will be ready."

"Then Zóra has not forgotten me," thought Abbas Khan, as he mused for a while before he rose; "and that was why she came to me in that sweet dream last night;" and as he shut his eyes and thought of her, the scenes at the mountain fort seemed to be repeated. But it was time to rise, and the soft smile on his bright face lingered there as his attendant Oomur entered, who could not help remarking it.

"May the day be happy and fortunate to my lord!" he said, making his usual profound reverence; "he had happy dreams last night, and rested well?"

"Indeed I had both, and feel strong and refreshed; and I thank you for your good wishes, Oomur."

"The Lady Fatima has inquired often for you, my lord; and once came and looked on you, but she said you slept like a child, and had a happy face, and were not to be disturbed. Now your bath is prepared, and your breakfast also."

"To which I am ready to do ample justice, I assure you. Where is Deenah, the armourer? Bid him come hither; I will follow you directly."

Deenah was in the ante-chamber, and entered with the mail shirt hanging over his arm.

"I have looked over every link of this, my lord," he said, after touching his master's feet, "and it is sound now," and he looked up significantly.

"Here, my lord, there was a dint, which had displaced two of the rings, but none are cracked or broken, and I have made them as good as ever. Mashalla! what workmen those were who made it; what temper in their steel! I am trying to imitate this, but my work will be clumsy. Look, my lord, you cannot see the place where the blow was; but I found some blood where the mail had touched your wound, and have sewn a little

soft silk padding over it, and there can be no chafing now. My lord will wear this to-day."

"Yes, Oomur, my other suit of armour is too heavy for one with a partly open wound; and this is just as secure, thou sayest?"

"More so, my lord," was the reply; "against any sword or dagger blow it is perfect protection, and yet so light that it would not fatigue a boy. And what sword will you take?"

"The one I bought from the Portuguese merchant, who said it was Spanish. I have a fancy for that to-day."

"Nor will it fail you, my lord, if there be need. It is quite ready, and I put a fine edge upon it only two days ago. Yes, it is a rare weapon, and there is none like it in the armoury. On foot or on horseback, it is alike useful. If I may, I will bring it."

"Not now, Deenah, I am too hungry; have it ready for me when I dress for the durbar. I have no other orders, except that I shall ride Sooltan to-day, and that I do not require heavy caparisons. The light new set which hath hardly been used will suit me to-day exactly; those of green velvet."

Abbas Khan was soon attired in his morning dress of light muslin, and his skilful barber's operations had removed every straggling hair from the yet tender beard and moustachios, and given a new beauty to his face, while the rakish tie of the beautiful

brocaded scarf which he had wound carelessly about his head, gave his handsome face an additional charm.

Very different was it from the pale shrunken features of the period of residence in Juldroog, or even from the anxious expression upon them with which he had visited the Queen the night before; and as he entered his aunt's apartments, the easy swinging gait, the cheerful smile with which he returned the salutations of the grave old eunuchs and the women servants, seemed so different to what she had seen on the preceding day, that his venerable aunt rose with a cry of joy that she could not suppress, and folded him in her arms.

It is not the custom of Mussulmans in India to congratulate any one upon improved personal appearance, for that is considered unlucky; but the blessings the worthy lady poured upon her adopted son went nigh to exhaust the names of saints in the Mussulman calendar, while she vowed thank offerings to every shrine in Beejapoor.

"Lallbee has tried to remember every dish thou art fond of," she continued; "and thou must eat well, for thou hast a long day before thee, Meeah."

"And an eventful one, mother," he said, earnestly, "as I will tell thee presently. Wait till I have eaten."

What a breakfast it was! The old cook was a Persian by birth, and was mistress of her craft; and not only her national dishes

but those of the Dekhan were perfect under her skilful hands. She would not be denied the privilege of bringing in the milk pilao, which she esteemed her *chef d'œuvre*; and, after blessing the young man, by passing her fingers over his face, and cracking her knuckles against her temples, sat down near the edge of the white cloth on which the dishes had been placed, and sometimes selecting a choice morsel herself, and feeding him with it, encouraged him to eat, and watched the gradual disappearance of the viands with a satisfaction that could not be repressed.

But even appetites like the young Khan's cannot endure long under such circumstances; and, after a hearty meal and ablution, he betook himself to his aunt's cushions, where her own hookah was brought to him, and, asking her to send away all the servants, he told her what had happened the night before, omitting nothing, not even the cowardly stab he received which had proved harmless.

At times the dear lady wept plenteously, but silently. She had been a brave soldier's wife from her childhood, and had often sent him to the field when there was little hope of seeing him again. Even now he might be in the heat of battle any day, and was old, with only a portion of his original strength and vigour; and what could she do but pray for him and commit his safety to the Lord?

So it was now. Precious as Abbas Khan was to her, she at

once declared that he had decided wisely; that malicious tongues would be silenced, and his honour, and that of the noble house he was heir to, freed from even a suspicion of unworthiness. "Go, Meeah," she said, "I have no fear—none. As thy Royal mistress hath blessed thee, so also do I;" and as he kneeled before her, she put her hands on his head and prayed fervently.

"And now, mother," he said, "in case my fate is against me, and I fall, weep not, for thou wilt know I was unworthy to live. Yet I have but one request to make of thee, mother; one only. I have discovered that it was the old physician Syud Ahmed Ali, who was blinded and banished long ago, who saved my life at Juldroog; and his granddaughter, Zóra-bee, watched by me. She is but a child, mother, and for what she did I would see her safe. The Queen will despatch messengers for the old blind man to-morrow, and she will be with him. But think of her being alone in this evil city, all beautiful as she is, and what chance hath she of escape?"

"She is no unworthy leman of thine, Meeah, I trust," said the lady, doubtfully. "Swear that to me!"

"Mother! mother!" he returned, reproachfully, "it were better I had never spoken. Oh! darling mother! what have I said that thou shouldst suspect me?"

"I was watching thee silently in the night, Meeah, and thou

wert dreaming of her. 'Zóra! Zóra!' escaped thy lips, and thy mouth was full of love."

"Yes," he said, gently, "I did dream. She came to me, mother, as a Houri of Paradise, with the celestial nectar, as she gave it to me the night I was stricken down with fever and my wound, and I hope she will tell thee of this herself some day. She is but a child yet; and if thou dost not believe me, ask Maria and the priest about her, they perhaps will satisfy thee more than I. Have I ever been a wanton profligate, mother?"

"No! no! no!" cried the lady, bursting into tears; "thou art true; never hast thou been false; and I believe thee fully. When didst thou ever deceive thy mother? Yet if thy dream had been of thy horse, thine armour, the jewels of thy house, or thy lands, I could have understood thee; but for a girl of whom I had never heard, what could I think, Meeah!"

"If I had been like others, mother," he returned——

"No matter," she said, interrupting him. "I tell thee before a woman's wiles and love the best have ever been weak; why not thou, my son? And yet I promise thee to do thy bidding. If Maria speaks for her she shall be to me as a daughter."

"Enough! enough! beloved mother!" cried the Khan, joyously clapping his hands; "what I have told thee was the only weight on my heart, and that is gone. As for property, surely my uncle is my heir, and may do as he pleases with it. If God wills I should die, what need I to think of it?"

"And I shall see you ere you depart, Mecah?"

"Hardly so, mother; a glance of regret or tears in thine eyes might unman me, and I need all the composure I can command. Embrace me and let me go." And she did so, as he wished, without any outward display of emotion, though her heart ached for her boy.

Abbas Khan attired himself carefully. His turban was of gold muslin brocade, and the links of the Milan chain were twisted into it as on the night before; but three twists were passed over his ears and under his chin, which protected his neck and side of his head completely. The shirt of mail over his muslin tunic felt easy and light, and the padding of the armourer prevented pressure on the wound. Over all he wore a splendid suit of rich cloth of gold of Benares, and jámahs, or petticoat-like trousers, which belonged to the full court dress, but which could be easily cast off if necessary.

Hastily he examined the beautiful Toledo blade he had ordered to be ready for him, which was a broad, double-edged rapier, sharp as a razor on both sides. It was stiff, yet in the highest degree flexible under pressure, and might have been, probably was, once the weapon of a matador. Its quaint handle of inlaid gold balanced the sword exactly, and it was a weapon which inspired confidence in strong, skilful hands. Abbas Khan bound his waist with a rich brocaded scarf, the ends of which hung down

on the right side, leaving the sword handle free. His retinue was ready, and at the lucky moment, directed by the family priest, he mounted his gallant horse, with a shout of "Bismilla!" echoed by all his followers, and passed on to the citadel.

He entered the gate with many others, strangers, friends, and acquaintances, and made his way direct through the main thoroughfare between the buildings attached to the Seven-Storeyed palace, and the main edifice in which lived ordinarily the King and his Queen Taj-ool-Nissa, Sooltana, the Queen Dowager, and other members of the family; and finally reached the Futteh Mydan, or plain of victory, a large open space which lay before the great archway of the hall of audience. This is now covered with brushwood, stones from the buildings around, and masses of crumbling masonry; but then it was smooth and clear. Not even a pebble was discernible among the short soft sward, which at that period of the year, the end of the monsoon, was in its greatest perfection.

It presented a noble and picturesque spectacle. Such was well calculated to stir the young soldier's heart. Around, at a little distance, stood the elephants and retinues of those who had already arrived. Some of their rich caparisons were of cloth of gold, others of European cloth, embroidered with gold, or thin native leather also embroidered. On their backs they bore howdahs; some large with canopies, some smaller without coverings, but all bearing the

weapons, bows and arrows, lances, or matchlocks of their owners, with their distinguishing banner or pennant.

Many of the noble beasts were excited and restless, and were trumpeting loudly, and blowing dust into the air with their trunks. Others were gentle and quiet, and steady, while their drivers made them play off the little tricks they had taught them. In front of the elephants were a line of horses, for the most part splendidly caparisoned; and from their armour, the morions and coats of mail of the riders—from spear heads and sword hilts by thousands, as well as from the many dresses of cloth of gold, the blazing sun flashed with a power and brilliance that the eyes could hardly endure.

It was a sight at once most gorgeous and impressive in itself; the costumes and banners of the ranks of infantry, interspersed with the cavalry—Dekhanies, Arabs, Persians, Oozbaks, Circassians, Tartars of many tribes, Georgians, Turks, and many other foreigners; while a strong division of Beydurs, in their peculiar costume of conical leather caps, and leather drawers, which has been described on a former occasion, were by no means the least conspicuous or remarkable of the motley assemblage.

"Oh, that Runga Naik were among them!" thought Abbas Khan, as he looked towards the body, whose peculiar long-barrelled matchlocks and broad-bladed spears formed a glittering mass,

from which the wild, quivering notes of their brass trumpets sounded at intervals. "Oh, that Runga were here!"

"Go, Yasin," he continued, to his standard-bearer, "see if Runga Naik is among the Beydur people yonder; if so, tell him I am here." But Runga was not there, and it was not known where he had gone; he had taken his men from Korikul and proceeded westwards.

Abbas Khan dismounted at the foot of the steps of the corridor from which the great hall was entered at several points by open arches, and passing by that which was nearest to his "misl," or appointed place, he paused for a few moments before he took his seat, and looked around him.

The vast area was entirely filled, except the middle, by rows of nobles and superior officers, and leaders of the divisions of tribes and troops, and formed a striking scene. All the civil officers, heads of departments, secretaries, and the like, were attired in the usual court dress of white muslin, with simply tied turbans of the same. All else, and they were by far the majority, wore, like himself, vests of cloth of gold, with the loose petticoat trousers, which, when seated, completely concealed their persons from the knees downwards. The varied colours of the cloths of gold, and of the numberless brocaded muslins, scarfs, and turbans, especially where a ray of sun lighted upon them, was dazzling and gorgeous in the extreme, and led the eye to the effect

outside, where, from the basement of the hall to the utmost limit of the open space, the divisions of the troops stood in their appointed places.

On the opposite side of the hall sat the grim-looking body of Abyssinians, for the most part clad in black chain mail, worn over their ordinary costume; and in a prominent place among them Yacoot, their champion, who, as he saw Abbas Khan enter, twisted what moustache he possessed with a defiant air, as, indeed, did most of the rest. On his own side, more towards the entrance to the hall, sat the chiefs of the Dekhanies, attired with all the brilliance they were famous for; and he saw that Hyat Khan, the head Kotwal, who, with the chamberlains, had marshalled the assembly, had placed between the several doubtful factions strong parties of Arabs, Turks, Persians, and other foreigners, so that collision between any was nearly, if not quite, impossible.

It was a spirit-stirring sight, and Abbas Khan, as room was made for him by an old friend, looked around him proudly. I shall have a goodly company to witness my fate, he thought, and be the issue as the Lord wills.

The audience hall is still in existence, but only as a noble ruin. The central arch of the façade is ninety-two feet in span, and of noble height, and the hall is perhaps two hundred feet in length. It is plain in character, but the groined shafts spring up to support the roof in graceful contour, like

those of a Gothic church, and were once covered with a profusion of gilding which has been scraped away. The King's throne on the upper dais, which was reserved for princes of the blood, religious dignitaries, and prime ministers of the State, was empty; but a small balcony, which projected from the main wall of the edifice, was usually the seat of the Queen, and it remained to be seen whether the actual Queen Taj-ool-Nissa would use it, or whether the Queen Regent would, as was frequently the case, occupy the throne on the dais.

The suspense was not of long continuance. After a short interval eunuchs were seen to pull down the transparent blinds of the balcony, which denoted the presence of the Queen, and almost at the same time the Queen Regent's slight figure was seen to issue from one of the archways on the basement, and, accompanied by a crowd of eunuchs and Royal slaves, seat herself upon the Royal throne. The whole assembly to a man rose to greet her, and the hearty shouts of the troops outside proclaimed the presence of the honoured and beloved lady.

Then the business of the day commenced. Some accounts were signed and audited, some messengers from foreign States bearing despatches were introduced by the Mirdhas, or ushers. Some officers, who had been on service and had returned, arose, and, their names and style being proclaimed, went forward, kissed the steps of the dais, and presented the hilts of their swords to the Regent.

As Abbas Khan advanced and passed close to the ranks of the Abyssinians, he was greeted by a scowl of fierce eyes, and murmurs which could hardly be repressed. But he took no notice, and resumed his seat without interruption.

"They will not be quiet long," said his friend, in a whisper; "they have vowed to be avenged on thee to-day for the murder, as they call it, of Elias Khan; but thou hast many friends, Abbas Khan, and should have no fear."

"Fear!" cried the young man; "I know no fear in this matter. Wait and see; but let there be no violence before the Queen."

Then the ushers called for petitions, and many were delivered to them to be read before the Queen; but, as one approached the Abyssinians, Yacoot arose, and in a loud, harsh voice, and broken Persian, mixed with his own uncouth speech, demanded permission to lay his petition at the foot of the throne.

"Let him approach and speak," said the Regent, in her sweet, clear voice, which was heard through the hall like a silver bell; and, indeed, at that moment a breathless silence had fallen on the whole assembly.

"He cannot speak so that the fountain of justice can understand," said a secretary, "but the paper can be read. Lay it there," he continued to Yacoot.

"She will not get it, someone will take it away; I will give it

to herself only," was his rude reply, as he drew his bulky figure to its full height, and twisted up his moustachios with a fierce gesture.

"Let him give it," said the Queen Regent, stretching out her hand; and, apparently satisfied, Yacoot knelt on a step of the dais and delivered it into her hand.

"Now I have seen you receive it," he said surlily; "and we look to you for justice, and I will take it if not given."

At any other time such a threat would have had short shrift, and a bloody ending under the great Adansonian trees, where traitors and other criminals were beheaded, and several persons advanced to arrest the speaker; but again the Queen's voice was heard.

"He means me no evil," she said; "he is only rude and unmannerly; do not molest him; let him go to his place, and he will hear his paper read."

But Yacoot seemed to have no intention of moving, and might have created a disturbance, but that two or three of his brotherhood dragged him away and forced him to sit down. The petition was then read, and purported to be from the whole of the Abyssinians, claiming justice from the State for the murder of Elias Khan, and charging Abbas Khan with rebellion and cowardice in having acted on behalf of the rebel forces.

"Let Abbas Khan reply," was the Queen's answer. "Let him

come before the throne and speak freely and truly;" and the young man came forward, with the same easy, graceful step which all knew, and not least his noble mistress.

We know what he told the assembly, addressing them as his friends and fellow-soldiers, praying them not to spare him if he were guilty. "The headsmen are near," he said, "and if God wills it I am ready to meet my fate. What matter how I die for my Queen!" and he said this with so smiling a face and so frank a manner that a murmur of applause ran through the assembly. But the Abyssinians rose to their feet as one man, and their swords, as if by one action, flashed from their scabbards.

"He hath a cunning tongue!" cried one. "We will cut it out of his mouth!" shouted Yacoot.

"Your Majesty had better quit the hall," said Hyat Khan, the Kotwal, joining his hands, "and leave these brawlers to me. Whatever happens, Yacoot must be arrested for last night's work, and I have force enough."

"Ah! Khan," returned the Queen, "that would be the sure way to begin bloodshed. No, I will remain as I am; I have no fear."

Meanwhile Abbas Khan stood where he had taken post as he addressed the assembly. He was exactly in front of the Abyssinians; but their action had no effect on him. Calm and unmoved, he felt secure though a hundred flashing swords were threatening his instant annihilation; but no one struck at him.

"Listen, all of ye, friends and brother soldiers," he cried in his manly voice, which echoed through the hall. "I am accused of murder, of which I am innocent; and of cowardice, which is worse. With my honour I can live, but without it I must die under your contempt. I appeal, therefore, to our time-honoured custom of ordeal, to be decided before our noble mother and Queen. Who of my enemies will meet me now? Even now, in the field yonder, and let Him who knows all hearts decide between my enemies and me. Behold, I am ready!"

Then arose from all parts of the hall cries of "We believe thee, noble Khan; thou hast no enemies among us."

"But I have enemies, nevertheless," he continued; "and, but for an accident, I had not been alive before ye to-day; and even in the precincts of the Palace I was not safe last night from attempted assassination. I see the man before me who struck the blow; he is the champion of the Abyssinians, and it is he I would meet in fair combat unto the death."

"I will not fight him," said Yacoot to his friends; "he bears a charmed life, else——"

"Thou art named Yacoot; and he means that thou wert the would-be assassin. Behold!" cried Hyat Khan, taking the remarkable Abyssinian dagger from his waistband. "Ye all know to whom this belonged; and, look, the point is broken, yet Abbas Khan is safe!"

"He is a coward; I will not fight with him," murmured the Abyssinian.

"Thou art accused of attempt at murder, Yacoot," said one of his companions; "'tis thou who art the coward, if thou refuse to fight Abbas Khan. Either to him and to God or to us thou must answer, for we tolerate no assassins."

"Come!" cried the young Khan. "Come, Yacoot! art thou afraid? Come, like a brave man as thou hast been. Nay, if thou dalliest, will this rouse thee?" and drawing his sword he slightly touched his antagonist on the shoulder, and escorted by a body of his friends turned to depart.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COMBAT.

ABBAS KHAN walked slowly out of the hall to the steps where his horse awaited him. There he removed his court drawers and pulled on his boots, which had been fastened to his saddle. "Thou must be steady and sure, good Sooltan, to-day," he said, stroking the head of his beautiful charger, who rubbed his nose against his master's breast, and answered by a low, loving whinny; and the young man, vaulting lightly into the saddle, loosed his shield from the saddle-bow, drew his sword, and paced gently round the front of the vast assembly, welcomed by shouts of generous greeting, and cries of "God keep thee safe!" His adversary did not delay to follow. He had replaced his turban with a steel morion, which flashed in the sun, but otherwise nothing relieved the dull black of the heavy chain mail by which he was protected. Many remarked that he looked livid as he mounted his horse, and that he impatiently jerked the bit of his fine Kattywar charger till it became violent and unmanageable; and he rode at full speed, as if it were his intention to overwhelm his antagonist. But Abbas Khan was too good a horseman to be suddenly surprised, and he evaded

the charge by a dexterous turn of his horse, which required that the Abyssinian should follow him into the centre of the field, where now the combat commenced in earnest. The Abyssinian had armed himself with a short, very heavy, and much curved sabre, his favourite weapon, which was known by the epithet of "Kussab," the butcher, from the deadly wounds it inflicted; and he had also a large shield, which nearly covered his person, and with his armour rendered him almost impenetrable. But Abbas Khan now felt the advantage of his longer weapon, by which and his skilful horsemanship he was able to keep his enemy at bay.

Who can describe the changing nature of the combat? Each now charging, now retreating, wheeling round, again closing, while blows enough to have beaten down the guard of a stronger man than Abbas Khan were showered upon his shield. The Queen saw the whole from her seat, and her lips were moving in silent prayer as she looked towards the whirling figures, and clasped her hands; and the faint shrieks and cries from the balcony above proved that excitement existed there also. But the combat was of no long duration. Abbas Khan had tried his antagonist again and again, and almost despaired of finding a vulnerable point, when in a fierce charge by the Abyssinian he saw that a portion of his helmet at the side under his ear was open, and as the encounter continued he drove his long narrow sword through it with all his force. There was a gush of blood; and after reeling in his

saddle, the huge champion fell to the ground heavily, and did not rise.

"He falls! he falls!" cried hundreds in the hall. "Look, noble lady," said Hyat Khan to the Queen, "he has fallen!"

"Who has fallen?" asked the Queen, faintly. She had been unable to look on to the end, for to her perception Abbas Khan seemed to have no chance before his enemy.

"Yacoot, the Abyssinian," replied the Kotwal. "Such is the wisdom and justice of the Lord. Ameen! Ameen!" and he hastened away to the spot. Yacoot was not dead, and was trying to speak; but he was too weak to rise.

"Some of ye tie a bandage round his neck," said Abbas Khan, "else he will die."

"Let him die," returned Hyat Khan. "Wouldst thou interfere with the sentence of the All Just and Powerful, Abbas Khan? Leave him in His hands. He hath met a soldier's fate, and that is more than he deserved. But what is that he is trying to get at behind, and clutches at though his fingers are stiffening? Take off his mail, some of ye, and untie his waistband. See, he is dead even now, noble Khan, and this is no indignity."

The searchers were well skilled in their work, and soon produced two humeeanas, or long narrow bags of soft leather, which appeared heavy with gold and silver coins, and which Hyat Khan himself took charge of; but there was another, broader bag, which

appeared to contain a great number of papers and letters, some of which seemed to be in Portuguese writing and some in Persian.

"Give them to our Lady Mother yourself, Abbas Khan; they may be Elias Khan's, and, if so, we need no more," said the Kotwal, who handed the bag to Abbas Khan. "Come, we delay; and, by Alla! 'twas well we found them. Take that away," he continued to his men; "lay it on the grass without the gate; some of his people will get it buried."

The shouts, the cries of joy and congratulation, the peculiar yells of his friends the Beydurs, had been overpowering; and as Abbas Khan rode past, making his horse caracole and prance at every step, and giving his graceful salutations to all, the enthusiasm was unbounded. As he was preparing to dismount at the steps of the corridor, his old retainer, Runga Naik, rushed through the crowd to embrace his feet. "I saw him die! I saw him die, Meeah!" he cried, "and I have brought in the rest. Do as thou wilt with them, for thou art safe, O my lord, and my prayers have been accepted."

"All of them, Runga? All of whom?"

"The men that were with us at Kórla. One by one I have tracked them down, even to Belgaum. Look!"

As a space was cleared, loud cries of "Amán! Amán! Mercy! mercy!" broke from a crowd of captives tied together; and one of them, who had been Abbas Khan's duffadar, cried out piteously

"Let me speak; let me speak before the assembly. I am a traitor and a rebel, and deserve death, but not before I have spoken, O my lord."

Let me and my people take charge from thee, Runga Naik," said the Kotwal. "Thy men are weary and footsore."

"I thought to have been here yesterday, noble Khan, but it could not be done. Yet I am not too late, and the duffadar should speak before the Queen."

"Let him follow me," said Abbas Khan; "this alone was needful to complete all." And as he advanced into the hall, hundreds poured forward to greet him. Nor was the Abyssinian party less demonstrative than any of the others. Then the duffadar, humbly prostrating himself before the throne, gave a clear account of the skirmish at the first onset by Elias Khan. He, and his men whom he had gained over, deserted to the rebels, and, but for the confusion which followed Elias Khan's death, Abbás Khan could not have escaped. Yacoot had followed them for some miles, but eventually lost them in the dust storm.

"God has judged the right," said a venerable officer of the Abyssinian party, making a low obeisance to the Queen with tears in his eyes as he presented the hilt of his sword to Abbas Khan; "and we pray the Queen's and your own forgiveness, noble soldier, that you were falsely accused, and some day in battle we may prove our devotion to you."

But who can describe the thankful joy of the noble Queen, who, impatient to greet her adopted son, and with her eyes streaming with tears, and in a broken voice, blessed him as he advanced, kissed the step of the Royal dais, and bowed his head before her. "Again I bless thee, O true and faithful," she said; "and the Lord hath done justice openly and before all men. My son, may thy years be long and honoured."

"Ameen! Ameen!" said the chief priest, devoutly; "he is worthy."

"Let no one leave," cried the Queen, in her clear, sweet voice, which all heard. "Keep silence till your lord the King's letter is read."

It was very brief, but he wrote that all the army of Ahmednugger, headed by the violent young King who had just ascended the throne, was advancing upon him; that his own troops were suffering from sickness; and that all the men available in Beejapoor, that could be spared, should be sent under any leader selected by herself; and, at its conclusion, the Queen Regent rose, her slight figure appearing almost visionary among the crowds of warriors who rose with her.

"Nobles and warriors," she said gracefully, "when I name Abbas Khan for this service, can I choose better? Bismilla! let it be so." And as Abbas Khan took the leaf of pán which was handed to him, and turned to the groups behind him, and cried,

"O friends, will ye accept me?" a shout arose through the vast building, and was taken up by the masses without with an enthusiasm beyond description. But what is there in life so fickle as the breath of popular favour?

"I must ask permission to return home for a while, mother," said the young man in a low voice as he stood by the throne; "but take this packet of papers which were found on him who died. My wound is uneasy, and needs my good physician's care. And as I saw there were Portuguese letters among them, I will bring the good Padré with me to the evening council. Do not allow them to go out of your own possession, they may be important."

"I will not," she replied. "Go, refresh yourself; I shall expect you and the Padré at the evening council."

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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